# International Understanding for Human Unity :

## Past Lessons and Present Prospects

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*Papers read at a seminar held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, India, from 1 to 3 March 2013 to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda*

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## Publisher's Note

Presentations and deliberations in congregations are supposed to leave a permanent imprint on the participants, and the presenters, too, are also included in some special sense. What about those sections of the civil society who are no less interested though they could not just make it to the venue? The couple of years marking the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of the transcendental personality, Swami Vivekananda, were an occasion for the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture to organize a series of international and national level conferences on some of the major concerns of civilization today. In the course of these initiatives,the relevance of Swamiji's teachings for the contemporary world came to be reaffirmed, time and again. All this needs to be made accessible to the reading public.

One such engaging concern is the prospects and problems of human unity, a goal which is obviously commendable but not very easy to achieve. The three-day (1 to 3 March, 2013) International Conference that was held at this Institute, keeping this concern in view, produced a good number of well-researched papers by eminent personalities drawn from different parts of this country and the world outside. We are, therefore, in a happy position now to present the valuable ideas emanating from the Conference in the shape of an edited volume titled : **International Understanding for Human Unity – Past Lessons and Present Prospects.**

In releasing the publication, I put on record my sincere thanks to everyone associated with such initiative. The efforts made by the coordinator, Professor Radharaman Chakrabarti deserve particular appreciation.

Swami Suparnananda

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# Inaugural Session

# Welcome Address

## Swami Sarvabhutananda

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President; Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Hon'ble Justice Asok Kumar Ganguly, Prof. Aswini Kanta Ray, former Professor, School of Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. Radharaman Chakrabarti, former Vice-Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University, presently the Project Director, UNESCO approved course on International Understanding for Human Unity at the RMIC, Dr. Saroj Ghose, former Director General of the Indian Council of Science Museums and the President of the International Council of Museums, esteemed educationists, seminarians, and philosophers from different parts of the country and abroad, respected monks and nuns, ladies and gentlemen, I extend a hearty welcome to all of you.

You are aware that this year various institutions and organizations are celebrating within and outside India the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. To commemorate the occasion, the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata has also taken up various plans and programmes on a big scale. This year i.e. 2012-2013 two National Seminars and one International Seminar have been organized by us successfully. The seminars were held on the topics:

i) 'Spirituality and Positive Psychology' on 29 & 30 September 2012.

ii) 'Significance of the Ideas of Swami Vivekananda in the Modern Age' from 14 to 16 December 2012.

iii) An International Seminar on 'Cultural Unity of India' (Phase - I) held from 16 to 19 January 2013.

iv) A National Seminar on 'Indian Traditions in Search of Unity through Music' held on 9 & 10 February 2013.

v) An Art Exhibition entitled 'Renaissance of India and the World: Life and Mission of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda has also been successfully organized by us.

Today, we are inaugurating a three-day International Seminar on International Understanding for Human Unity: Past Lessons and Present Prospects. We are organizing this Seminar with an aim to bring forth one of the core teachings of Swami Vivekananda which is essential unity of all beings including mankind.

Human Unity should be the acknowledged goal of human civilization. But its appreciation changes over time. In normal times when peace prevails, when people behave in a friendly manner the feeling grows that we all belong to our 'Growing Human Family'. Cultural and other differences may be there but they do not defeat the main objective of unity.

We all know that one of the great themes of Vedanta is Oneness of everything. We shall see how it demonstrates that all our misery comes through ignorance, and this ignorance is the idea of manifoldness, this separation between man and man, between nation and nation, between earth and moon, between moon and sun. Out of this idea of separation between atom and atom comes all misery. But Vedanta says this separation does not exist, it is not real. It is merely apparent, on the surface. In the heart of things there is unity still. If you go below the surface, you find that unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, god and man and man and animal. If you go deep enough all will be seen as variations of the One, and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no

delusion. Swami Vivekananda pointed out that solidarity of the entire existence was one of the greatest findings of the Indian mind.

Keeping this basic and tested truth in view, men as thinking beings guided by reason, need to find out how much of effort has been devoted by societies and nations to come closer to the goals of human unity. They need to ponder over the long, long years that have gone into waste as kings, empire builders and, now the political class, appear to be reluctant to practice the virtues of restraint in the exercise of their powers. The tendency to take conflicts and disputes, differences of faith and beliefs, friction of small interests to the extreme and indulge in violence of every description has arrested the ability to exercise an enlightened rationality in all such matters.

Ramakrishna Mission is practically committed to the ideal of human unity. From the very beginning Ramakrishna Mission is trying to move towards this goal. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly told that 'to be good and to do good' is the core of religions. This message of Swami Vivekananda is based on the fact that the central truth or the core of every religion is scientific and he tried to teach the core of religion as the 'science of spirituality'. Swami Vivekananda very clearly stated, 'Religion is the manifestation of the natural strength that is in man.' He says, doctrine or dogmas, rituals or books, holy texts, or temples, are but the secondary details.

If we study human society, we find that this diversity is necessary and natural and this must be accepted. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly harped on the ideology of unity. By unity he meant the essence of religion which is the core of Indian culture. He said 'National Union in India must be a gathering up of scattered spiritual forces. Our nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat with the same truth.

Therefore, let us try to understand our own faith and it will help us, not only in our personal life, but it will improve the quality of our social life. It will definitely foster better understanding among the different groups of people of different religions.

We sincerely hope that these three days of lively academic discussions will definitely encourage the sincere learners to further their research with a renewed vigour.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for extending their financial help for this seminar.

May the Blessing of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna Deva, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda be on us. Thank you all.

# About the Seminar

Radharaman Chakrabarti

This seminar is essentially about humanity, the core concern being the collective destiny of human beings, wherever they are. We are not going to think of Indians, Europeans, Africans or other groups as such. Our concern is inclusive.

As a discerning being, man has to put himself under constant vigil and careful self-scrutiny. For in thought and action, he is accountable — primarily and ultimately to himself. Other reasons apart, it is man who is driven by objectives that he sets for himself and hence he has to see how far he could live upto those objectives and how he must own up responsibility for all that may have gone wrong.

Evidently, the exercise has never been — or rather, it could not have been, a matter of complete and permanent satisfaction. It is not that the goal recedes every time man comes close to it. It is not that he has decided to pursue a chimera. On the contrary, he likes himself to go on pushing his goals higher, as soon as he reaches a given level. And even if he finds it to be a chimera, man would first make sure that he gets the better of it, before he rejects it outright.

That being an inseparable aspect of man's nature we find its larger reflection in the collective endeavours of man which we call civilization. There we find that the journey of human civilization has been, rarely ever, smooth or uniform. Many a cross roads had to be faced, many road blocks had to be cleared – and choosing the right course has been anything but easy. In a few cases, like big empires of the ancient and

medieval times, the journey ended in a point of no return. The less obvious was to keep one's options open and learn being less dominant and more accommodative.

Fortunately, however, despite many retrograde steps, the overall direction of the movement appears to have been on the positive track. Stress has been laid ultimately on stability over instability, collaboration over discord, amalgamation over exclusion and so on.

This may sound a bit oversimplified, rather a bit overoptimistic. The evidence to the contrary may have been more weighty, at times frustrating. Nevertheless, history does not warrant a total and mindless rejection of the prospects that ultimately proved to be positive. There has always been a tendency to do better than in the past and overtime this makes for a certain amount of resilience.

That is what keeps societies going; that is what ensures redemption of hopes that were temporarily lost. Damages have been there, but they seldom proved to be irreparable.

If that is the main lesson we have learned so far, then what else are we supposed to do in this seminar? I have two immediate considerations from which to respond. The first one is: to put this basic lesson of history to a litmus test, through searching queries that address the present day realities – realities that are far more complex, and generate far more uncertainties than mankind had ever encountered in the past. We must therefore make sure how hopeful we can be so far as dealing with the present day complexities are concerned.

My second line of response is more directly related to the modality of the present seminar. I am referring to an essentially interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary mode – in which, we would exercise our minds. And that is what is going to happen – mainly because we have here a unique combination of scholars

from a wide range of disciplines. That makes us especially grateful to all the delegates from different parts of India as well as from far away lands, for kindly consenting to be part of this exercise. Tomorrow morning onward, we shall have the benefit of their valued and varied thoughts, their distilled wisdom so to say, to make a multi-dimensional dialogue materialize. And that in itself could be regarded as an excellent specimen of exercise in human unity.

As the programme will unveil itself, we shall see that it is meant to be at once structured and flexible. Structurally, we shall organize our thoughts along certain defined lines of enquiry – such as: the East-West interface // India's message to the world // the civilizational predicaments // Institutionalized efforts at unity // International civil society movements // Impact of intercultural dialogue // Arms and men in and without uniform // and the most current turmoil in the ecological and economic contexts. Though these sub-themes will be dealt with in different panels – nine of them in all, yet without getting compartmentalized, we would take due care of the underlying thematic spirit running through each. The upshot of deliberations in one panel could very well have a spill-over on many that would follow one after another. On the whole, therefore, we shall remain focused on the overall thrust towards human unity.

So, that is what we shall be doing in the course of the two - day deliberations. We shall be examining the validity of received wisdom on all related questions and would also put to test the present ability of societies to move further ahead towards the goal of human unity. We need to place, side by side, the claims of cultural hegemony, cultural homogenization and cultural pluralism. We need to make a comparative assessment of the returns from remaining nationally divided while bargaining for

survival on one hand and returns on the other hand in a federated and strengthening Global Civil Society. In short, we need not romanticize unity as an ideal but we need to satisfy ourselves that this is an achievable objective and also to check if, at the present moment, we are on the right path to achieve this objective. Looking back again to the past, we step into the records of mankind's struggle to overcome its limitations, to recognize its many indiscretions and to emerge larger than a mere assortment of self-seeking mortals. Indeed, man has been learning the virtues, or better still, the imperatives of unity through trial and error. Lessons learned in the past by nations, severally and collectively, constitute significant milestones on the path leading incrementally to harmonization. On the contrary all the markers of perceived separateness, all the mental sediments of prejudices and distrust, and all the vainglorious attempts to blow up small identities have not disappeared. Nor are they going to diminish soon enough.

At the same time the dangers inherent in such irrational attitudes cannot and do not escape attention. Wars are not being seen any more as sacred but as a scourge. The sanctity of peace making does come back after a frenzy of violence. Even state sovereignty, a die hard notion, is getting reconciled to the regulatory mandates of international law and international organizations. Where old laws are found either inadequate or unworkable efforts are not spared to work out new regime formation. In fact today's global summitry and multilateral conventions can easily be seen as a self-limiting exercise on the part of sovereign states.

How do we interpret such phenomena? There could be different ways of looking at them. We may take them as indicators of a voluntary acceptance of restraints, though at times reluctant – and hence as an indicator of the ascendancy

of reason. Or, we may take a cynical view that these are but postures of expediency, and in reality, the powerful states would not yield anything substantial to uphold common good. Whatever the mindset we exhibit thereby, there is no denying the fact that this new persuasion to opt for a rule-based system in place of undeterred sovereign arbitrariness is the result of sustained movements — behind which many forces are at work, both local and transnational. This is where one can see more and more clearly the emergence of an international civil society. Admittedly this emerging global entity is still loose and amorphous at the moment. Nevertheless, it is steadily getting organized and heading towards a firmer position. In fact it is because of this growing international public domain that we find an impressive display of cross-border cooperation – in politics, defence, trade, commerce, culture and what not. Along with that we also cannot fail to notice the expanding knowledge base of mankind – in science, technology, art, architecture, health care; and all this is now a shared or sharable possession which we may call the 'common heritage of mankind'. Or else how could one explain that India opening its advanced health care system for the mortally afflicted citizens of Pakistan, a country which has been anything but friendly to its generous neighbour? Similarly, it is common concern about an impending ecological disaster that unites the common people of developing nations today to look out for cleaner sources of energy, economise the use of carbon fuel and accept self-imposed precautions against climatic collapse.

So there is no stupidity in being hopeful about the progress of humanity on the path of cooperation. And also, there is no alternative to seeking the correctives that must be set on motion so that we may live safe and live at peace.

The existential imperatives of the modern times are compelling us to be prudent. Organized societies everywhere are getting increasingly closer as a result of the information and communication revolution, bringing in its wake many undreamt of benefits as well as many menacing developments such as global terrorism. The challenge before us is not so much of a scenario on 'clash of civilizations' but an advanced and universal readiness to ensure that such a clash is stoppable. Again demand of the present times is not so much to decry globalization which is and perhaps will be there but to use its 'contents' and discard its 'discontents'. Globalization must be made a both way process – between the global and the local. We all know that while globalization unites many, it marginalizes many many more. There is no reason why we cannot make it inclusive. Right now nations are going through trying times. This is due to what we may call wicked economics or false economics. Hopefully there has to be the right kind of economics taking the front stage again. These are prospects that must keep us engaged.

Now all that I have been saying so long is likely to sound much too anthropocentric – as though, when we talk about human unity we need to think only about the dominant bipeds that we are on this planet soon to touch a 9 – billion figure.

But then this little planet is also the habitat for numerous others, indeed billions of other animate objects. It is a huge biotic sphere that we need to preserve by all means. It therefore needs a global consensus and global effort to nurture the bio-diversity, to desist from biopiracy and to study the behaviour of different species undisturbed in their own habitat. They do have so much to teach man even though they are regarded as lower biological species. So, what we mean by human unity has got a lot to do with man-nature unity.

This is my humble effort to place the seminar in context. In no way my words are intended to be a pre-script but only a curtain raiser to the stage shortly to be taken over by the learned delegates, tomorrow and the day after.

One last word: this entire endeavour to hold such a meeting of minds owes its origin to the inspirational lead that we got from our very own friend, philosopher and guide — Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji. Eight years back, we could launch the present project on Human Unity with UNESCO support, entirely because of his imagination, patronage and boundless blessings.

# Inaugural Address

## Human Unity and Democracy

Aswini Kanta Ray

While the ideal of human unity is among the philosophical inheritances of the oriental civilization since the era of the Bhagwat Geeta, and built upon in more recent times among others by Rishi Aurobindo, Swami Vivekanananda and Tagore, liberal democracy portraying the flag of individual liberty has been among the abiding contributions of western modernity to human civilisation. But empirically, both human unity and liberal democracy in any universal sense have had only limited success. While large areas of human concerns have been brought under united action, and a global nuclear war avoided by collective action; similarly, western liberal democracy in its quintessential sense of a wide social base of individual liberty have only been successfully replicated in societies with a large émigré population of western vintage like in North America, Australia, and Newzealand. But in entrenched traditional societies of Asia, Africa and South America, still described as the "Third world" – as a metaphor of economic decay and political repression – the social base of individual freedom is rather narrow; and simultaneously, the social base for human unity is predictably also low. Meanwhile, after the unanticipated collapse of the socialist utopia, globalised industrial capitalist grid is hegemonised by the United States, and youthful aspirations across the world is divided between those with the 'Green Card' and those aspiring to have it. Within such a scenario, global resources in most spheres of human aspirations is monopolized by 1% of the population living

in the industrial capitalist world, and the absolute poor constituting an overwhelming majority of human beings inhabiting the rest of the world; this empirical reality could not provide a conducive social base for human unity as so often repeated by oriental philosophers of human unity like Swami Vivekananda, or the western architects of global democracy.

While despite the globalization of industrial capitalism, the weak global salience of liberal democracy as such has to be explored for its fault lines, its many accomplishments in the intervening period must also be acknowledged to assess its potentials to promote greater human unity. For a start, many of the liberal concerns have been indigenized across the world in many ingenious ways to suit local specificities that is quite promising to provide the basis to promote further human unity. Among the better case scenarios of such attempts in the non-western world is the Indian example which has the record of nearly-uninterrupted elected regimes in its post-colonial Republican era. But its version of secularism, as a structural imperative of its multi-religious democracy is for the state-apparatus to remain equally close to all its deeply religious people than be totally separate from them, as in the West: from experience, It has learnt to celebrate Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain festivals; and, incubated in the midst of one of the most violent religious holocaust, it has survived periodic communal violences as also nudging from neighbouring theocratic military regimes; and observes separate civil codes for its many religious groups despite the constitutional mandate to the contrary; it has neither banned the *Burqua* nor the Turban. This "soft secularism", as a structural component of its democracy to accommodate the sensitivities of its vast cultural minorities has elevated many elected members from such communities to the highest level of public office. Similarly, India's policy of

"Reservation" as an innovative version of western Affirmative Action has incubated many elected leaders from large sections of its former "untouchable" castes now constitutionally outlawed, but socially and politically still relevant. Such creative attempts at making Indian democracy more inclusive of its socially disadvantaged groups has also ushered in a new Right of Public Interest Litigation, of Information, Clean Environment and, most important, a massive mass social movement against corruption and gender-justice that has the potentials of encompassing other democratic concerns. In many ways, the new social movements ushered by the Civil Society are emerging as a potential substitute for its democratic institutions atrophying by corruption and criminalization; also, as a foil of individual liberty against an increasingly repressive state.

Similarly, South Africa's "Truth & Reconciliation Commission" after its long Apartheid policies, and politically unstable Bangladesh's attempts at womens' empowerment through its imaginative *Grameen Bank* or its *Barefoot nurses* movements have been innovative local variations of the liberal-democratic concern for social justice, and remarkably successful with potentials for replication in comparable non-western societies than many of the western experiments. The universal appeal for the democratic ideals could also be underscored by the examples of the many diverse regimes across the world seeking democratic legitimacy through disingenuous models by faking the label. These include Pakistan's "Basic Democracy" under Field Marshall President Ayub Khan; "Guided Dmocracy " and 'NASAKOM Democracy' of General Soekarno in Indonesia and Marshall Tito's 'Democratic Socialism' in Yugoslavia followed by the series of the Socialist Democracies in the former communist states, along with the short-lived "Arab Spring" that dismantled some of the entrenched ruling oligarchies in the region. In Africa,

elected Presidents like Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Nkrumah also for long successfully launched their versions of 'One-party Democracies' on the lines of India's "Congress-system" in their immediate post-colonial era to provide stability to their developmental agenda. In more recent times, the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has innovated its version of "Gross National Happiness" as a measure of "Human Development" attracting global attention. In fact, President Sarkozy had invited the Nobel Laureates Amartya Sen and Joseph Steiglietch to explore its potentials for France.

Another interesting development is the attempt in some of the post-colonial democracies to involve the Armed Forces as an institution in the democratic process from the experience of Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the cold war era. In some countries like Thailand, revived Monarchies, as elected regimes have also emerged as potential substitutes for many corrupt political parties. Similarly, in the post-colonial democracies of South Asia, resembling the Royalty in the Monarchical system still surviving in many European democracies, elected hereditary regimes have emerged with their political legitimacy rooted in the colonial liberation struggle to provide democratic stability to the regimes. It seems democracy, like socialism in the heydays of its ideological appeal in the seventies, is "like a hat which has lost its shape, because everyone wears it".

But despite some valiant attempts at improvisation, arguably because of them, western liberal democracies are operationally strikingly asymmetrical from their post-colonial creations, in spite of comparable institutions ; even a cursory view of the Westminister model as the "Mother of parliament", and its Indian progeny would bear it out. Like England and America divided by their different versions of the same language, it seems

England and India are also divided by their different operational versions of the same form of parliamentary democracy. Not just England and India, all operational versions of post-colonial democracies are not only asymmetrical from their original western inspirations, but also from one another, despite comparable institutions. This is not surprising, because each post-colonial society is structurally different from one another, and each alien to their western Mothers.

It seems that one of the major faultline of the global agenda to promote human unity through democracy has been the attempt to globalise western liberal democracy that is rooted in individual liberty. For a start, because in the bulk of the non-western world, individual liberty always has had low valence in the popular perceptions. In these societies, the priority was always given to group rights like that of the family, caste, community or the nation during the anti-colonial liberation struggle; in this sense, western liberal democracy based on individual rights was somewhat alien to the political culture of the non-western societies. That may explain the operational incongruity of western liberal democracies for the non-western world as sharply underscored in the case of India.

Yet the demonstration effects of western liberal democracies in their native habitats and the political culture of globalised industrial capitalism has already incubated a conducive social base for a cross-cultural dialogue of civilizations to agree upon the threshold level of indices for democratic governance.

Beyond the threshold, the western institutions must be adapted to different local specificities with creative imagination. We have already underscored many such cases of improvisation to suit local specificities. One can now multiply such examples from the non-western experiences to draw upon as resources.

Globalising democracies by itself does not of course necessarily promote human unity, as we have seen from our present experience of the western world. But it does eliminate the obstacles to promote such unity. But in a globalised economic and information system, democracy, to be viable within the states must be complemented by democracy among them. Empirically, in the present scenario, there are deficits at both ends which explain the absence of both human unity and democracy in their Universalist sense. This situation underscores the need for a dialogue between the inheritors of the non-western philosophical proponents of human unity and the western advocates of democracy . But at the end of the day, it is also a political challenge.

# The Quest for Human Unity as Viewed by Swami Vivekananda

Swami Prabhananda

*sarvāṇi bhūtāṇi viśantu saukhyam*
*sarvāṇi bhūtāṇi bhajantu śāntim /*
*sarvāṇi bhutānyapi nārāyaṇaḥ*
*sampūrṇamānandamupāśrayantam //*

May all come together in friendly relation. Let all be peaceful. In all beings is the Narayana. Let all embrace fulfilment of joy.

UNESCO is committed to maintain peace so that every nation can advance unobtrusively. To ensure this goal, Human Unity need to serve like a substratum of rock. Few questions crop up. Can human unity be truly achieved? Why we shall consider the ideal upheld by Swami Vivekananda? Is it because we are celebrating the great Swami's 150th birth anniversary?

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission established by Swami Vivekananda, is aspiring to achieve ultimately Human Unity, so also the World body United Nations, and its branch UNESCO. UNESCO education specialist Alisher Ulmanov while delivering the seventh annual convocation strongly recommended the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture International Course 'Understanding of Human Unity' to be a full-time UNESCO course. Interestingly, Dr Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO made a speech on 8 October, 1993. He said, 'I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitution of the Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established as early as

1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945. Both place the human being at the centre of their efforts aimed at development. Both place tolerance at the top of the agenda for building peace and democracy. Both recognize the variety of human cultures and societies as an essential aspect of common heritage. Both of them put their Institutions at the service of the peace, tolerance, Human rights and peaceful co-existence, all the time remaining faithful to respective original goals. While UNESCO made some 30 declarations expressing a will to promote education, science, culture, research and teaching, justice and the moral and intellectual solidarity, the Ramakrishna Mission is sincerely propagating the path stimulated by spirituality at individual and institutional level.

To achieve human unity, theoreticians advise us to cut the robes of the nationality, caste and culture to reveal the base bones of the humanity but field workers think this to be a day dream. Among the great dividers of humanity, religion has been identified as the most challenging one. To address the challenge, the United Nations adopted two major declarations, one in 1981 and another in 1993. We may also recall the UN Millennium declaration adopted on 8 September, 2000. In spite of these measures, the world recorded its dismay and condemnation at the serious instances, including acts of violence, of intolerance and discrimination on the ground of religion or belief among other socio-economic issues occurring in many parts of the world.

None can deny the binding and consequently unifying capacity of religion. Besides, religion provides opportunities to man for manifesting his creative potentials. Religion is something unavoidable, particularly in a country like India, which has been nourished by religion, the essence of which is spirituality. Here religion is being and becoming. And it is the innermost core of education which helps a learner manifest divinity already in him.

Religion is committed to peace and harmony. However, looking into its track record Swami Vivekananda observed, 'The noblest words of peace that the world has ever heard have come from men on the religious plane and the bitterest denunciation that the world has ever known has been uttered by religious men.' (CW, II/p.375) Man gratefully remembers the finest contribution of religion in building the best elements of human culture; likewise sadly remembers what happened on 11 September, 2001 in New York and on 26 November, 2008 in Mumbai and the latest one that struck Hyderabad on 21 February, 2013.

Some countries took desperate measure of banishing religion. As for example, the erstwhile Soviet Russia discarded religion but it returned in much worse form. India, the land of religion, adopted secularism in 1972 and today India seems to have been torn from her moorings and drifting. India tried to by-pass religion on the plea of secularism and abolished spiritual education in schools. Consequently, gross materialism destroyed the peoples' finer sensibilities. The terrible fallout of neo-liberalism and the resultant marginalization of the poor people have created serious discontent. Worst of all the moral and ethical level have touched the bottom giving way to rampant corruption and India has been branded as one of the most corrupt countries. To have a better understanding of the dilemma, let us go deep into the issues involved. Can we truly dismiss religion?

Historians Will Durant and Ariel Durant admitted in their scholarly book **The Lessons of History**, 1968, 'There is no significant example in history, before our time of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion' (p. 51). Simultaneously, we should remember George Washington who said in his Farewell Address, "Of all the dispositions and habits which led to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. Reason and experience both forbid us to

expect that natural morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles." (Quoted in The Gift Unopened, p.34) Along with them we may recall Swami Vivekananda saying, 'if we discover that there is one unity running through all these developments, spiritual, moral, and social, we shall find that religion, in the fullest sense of the word, must come into society, and into our every life.' (CW, II/p115-16)

Next, let us consider a still deeper issue. International understanding should be effective first at individual level, community level and national level before we expect it to be operative at International level. Looking back we see Arnold Toynbee in his 'Civilization on Trial' (1948) writing, 'Man is relatively good at dealing with non-human nature. What he is bad at is his dealing with human nature in himself and his fellow beings.' As human civilization was evolving this problem of understanding human nature had to be addressed carefully but it was never done with a long term vision. Consequently, serious problems relating to misunderstanding of human nature often flared up.

Albert Einstein is reported to have warned, in 1946, after he realized the horror of Hiroshima: "Our world faces a crisis as yet unperceived by those possessing the power to make great decisions for good and evil. The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe."

Now, the Indian civilization has some unique characteristics which we do not find in European civilization, although both have civilization, for which each of them is proud. Under the facade of diversity, India has always enjoyed a deep belief of fundamental unity, thereby Indian civilization could easily accomplish nationhood and political unity whereas Europe has not made convincing progress, although the Brussels agreement, according

to some, have demonstrated that European union is a cohesive entity, more than a mere geographical expression (Statesman, 12.02.13)

From a wider perspective we should take note of a cluster of crises. The present world is confronting major challenges like climate change, environmental degradation, unsustainable consumption levels, widening inequalities etc. There is an imperative need for a radical change to restore environment, equity and long term sustainability which include consideration for future generation as well. Actions taken so far by countries are inadequate and humanity is not yet moving fast enough to avoid the portending disaster.

Next, we need to answer why we have chosen Swami Vivekananda. We believe Swami Vivekananda is a colossus power who can guide humanity today. Famous Indologist A. L. Basham stated, '....in centuries to come he (Swami Vivekananda) will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world.' We can quote from similar other authorities on this issue.

The world today is going through a challenging period of transition. We see many evils like racism and inter-ethnic and religious conflict returning among us with renewed force. Ignoring Vivekananda's warning against sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism in the World Parliament of Religions, there has appeared the demon of terrorism. Now we have the problem of sustaining Indian tradition of unity in diversity in the face of India emerging in 21st century on principles of equality and democratic institutions. The real challenge is to maintain the diversity and the spirit of accommodation inherited from the past, at least to a reasonable extent, while repudiating hierarchy and creating more space for individual freedom. From a still wider perspective in today's world of globalization, we need to understand today's

underpinning for human unity; today's youth with liberal education aspire to feel that he is the part of the whole of unity of mankind. He argues for perception of oneness, and therewith a feeling of inter-connectivity and inter-dependence. To pursue this goal, society needs sustainable values and not situational values that is the current trend.

Though the search for human unity is powerfully ingrained in the human mind, we see, in practice human unity is a much cherished but an elusive goal. Jawaharlal Nehru echoed the voice of several great minds when he said, 'Some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardization of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.' (p. 61) To explain this process of unity, we often find mention of western concepts like "melting pot", "cultural mosaic" and "plural society"; these are perhaps not justifiable. Indian society in ancient, medieval and modern times always believed in an underlying unity and oneness of life that created a composite culture which projects the mainstream culture of India. India is only integrated politically and not otherwise. Also, India has a distinct national identity in spite of its composite culture. In spite of difference in language, religion, dress and manners, Indian culture is homogeneous, Thus the cultural unity of India is a unique phenomenon and unparalleled in the chequered annals of history. Unlike many other societies, Indian society in general has never been rigid; rather it has maintained a remarkable degree of flexibility. As a result, India has for all practical purpose absorbed waves of foreign culture which invaded India time and again. Also many social reforms of subsequent periods have been assimilated in the composite culture.

In an article Swamiji wrote, "Knowledge is to find unity in the midst of diversity- to establish unity among things which appear to us to be different from one another. This particular relation by which man finds the sameness is called Law. This is what is known as Natural Law." (CW,V/p.519) It is therefore, rather natural to find the search for Unity a characteristic—a special characteristic of Indian civilization. It is the spirit of oneness which subsists between the units by which the same spirit dwells in each unit. Also, it be noted that the unity is organic unity that brings change, development or progress that happens gradually rather than in a sudden or forced way. Indian cultural unity upholds this characteristic too. If the mainstream culture symbolically resembles a spread out huge banyan tree, its branches may be termed as Oriya culture, Maharastrian culture, Bengali culture etc. In this context, let us keep in view the word 'harmony' which hints primarily at non-contradiction and also the word 'synthesis' which means the combining of the separate things, ideas etc. into a complete whole. So, unity may be conceived as a synthesis of diversities.

In the context of Western science, Swami Vivekananda clearly stated, 'In modern language, the theme of the Upanishads is to find an ultimate unity of things. Knowledge is nothing but finding unity in the midst of diversity. Every science is based upon this; all human knowledge is based upon the finding of unity in the midst of diversity; and if it is the task of small fragments of human knowledge, which we call our sciences, to find unity in the midst of a few different phenomena, the task becomes stupendous when the theme before us is to find unity in the midst of the marvellously diversified universe, where prevail unnumbered differences in name and form, in matter and spirit — each thought differing from every other thought, each form differing from every other form. Yet, to harmonise these many planes and

unending Lokas, in the midst of this infinite variety to find unity, is the theme of the Upanishads.' (CW, III/p.397-98)

In his public address entitled, 'The Mission of the Vedanta' Swamiji said, 'Wherever there is evil and wherever there is ignorance and want of knowledge, I have found out by experience that all evil comes....relying upon differences, and that all good comes from faith in equality, in the underlying sameness and oneness of things.' The regeneration of the Indian people, with the masses placed in the position of primacy which they had always been denied, was to be tried but the entire exercise was to be charged by spirituality. In his perception, human life and infact the entire universe was an indivisible totality. This goal was drawn from the Vedantic tradition as taught by his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji emphatically pleaded, 'I only ask you to work to realize more and more the Vedantic ideal of the solidarity of man and his inborn divine nature.' (CW, III/p.196)

To meet the complex needs of today's world, Swami Vivekananda preached a universalist spiritual faith. He recommended a universal religion, 'which will have a place for, every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity; making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its policy, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.' (CW, I/p.19) Such a religion will spontaneously generate feelings of love and sympathy in the hearts of men.

In search of universal unity, we are proud to record our forefathers' discovery that the idea of separateness was

erroneous, there is oneness of life. Vedanta pointedly says, separation between man and man, between man and moon does not exist, separation is not real. It is merely apparent. Swamiji says, 'In the heart of things there is unity still. If you go below the surface, you find that unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough, all will be seen as only variations of the One, and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion. .....He has traced the reality of everything to the Lord, the centre, the unity of everything, and that is eternal existence, eternal knowledge, eternal bliss.' (CW, II/p.153)

Equally important to note that oneness of existence is the basis of all morality and ethics. Every holy text preaches "love your fellowmen", but does not mention why should I care for my fellowmen. The Vedanta provides the answer. In the words of Swami Vivekananda ; '.....the whole world is one – the oneness of the universe – the solidarity of all life - that in hurting anyone I am hurting myself, in loving anyone I am loving myself. Hence we understand why it is that we ought not to hurt others. The reason for ethics, therefore, can only be had from this ideal of the Impersonal God.' (CW, III/p.129-30)

We need to realize that there is a common ground behind the material, mental and spiritual worlds which are but variegated expressions of the same reality, the common ground. Unity and oneness of life is not only a grand ideal but a fact of life. The more this idea of the solidarity of man and man's innate divine nature is understood and practised, the more we can attain peace and harmony at all levels of life. But do how many really ask for it?

To face the serious challenges of to-days' world, it is necessary to have some big shift in goals, institutions and values. Also, it requires a change in attitudes and actions at the individual, community and country levels so as to have a realistic

understanding of the problem and its dimensions, as well as sincere assimilation of Swami Vivekananda's ideas and ideals. I sincerely believe, ideas of Swami Vivekananda can squarely provide guideline for developing a world-vision in keeping with his dream. His ideas can bridge the gulf between action and contemplation, work and worship, the sacred and secular.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of persons are groping while they themselves are drifting in the morass of gross materialistic life; most of them do not have any ideal at all. It is wise to have an ideal and therewith sincere pursuit for achieving the same. Swamiji exhorts, 'Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes.' (CW, III/p.193) Simultaneously, all of us should try to have a broader international view and understanding. Swami Vivekananda reminds us: 'There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual – to know that I and my brother are one. This is true for all countries and all people.' (CW, VIII/p.350) To reap the benefit of spirituality, religious harmony and understanding in society as a whole need to be promoted consciously. These ideas and the world vision have to be implemented at the individual and collective level. No doubt this entails a new paradigm of social and spiritual goals and also reviewing the objectives of the existing policies and institutions.

Material wealth, swelling consumption of pleasurable things and organic satisfaction are generally sought after by man and woman. After a chain of enjoyment there is a satiation, prompting to a quest for fresh, newer pleasure and satisfaction. Vedanta does not condemn man's pursuit of worldly pleasure to powers. It draws attention to the fact 'There is something better and higher than these.' To those interested in this pursuit, it leads man gradually to the highest manifestation of his potential divinity and peaceful co-existence.

Swamiji made a bold promise before he passed away, 'I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.' (CW, V/p.414) And to prepare the ground for this, he in his short life of less than a decade, preached broad-based 'Vedanta', a universalist spiritual faith and advised young men to create a mass consciousness through service of man as worship of God and education of the masses for self-reliance. It seemed the seed fell on very infertile soil. I quote from Sister Nivedita's letter to Miss Josephine Macleod, dated 11 April, 1906. She writes, 'You, when we who understood Swamiji, and remember Him are dead, there will come a long period of obscurity and silence, for the work that He did. It will seem to be forgotten, until, suddenly, in 150 or 200 years, it will be found to have transformed the West.' The present upsurge in connection with his 150th birth anniversary celebration authenticates Sister Nivedita's prophecy and hints at present prospects.

# Presidential Address

Asok Kumar Ganguly

It was the Indian thinkers who thought about the concept of human unity for the first time in this world. Emperor Ashoka the great of the third century BC, had principles and messages inscribed on various rocks and pillars throughout his huge empire which encompassed the vast landmass stretching from Tashkent in the USSR, what is today known as Afghanistan and Pakistan, down up to the Karnataka region in South India. People can read them even today. He had written, *samanvaya eva sadhuh* which means Concord alone is correct and proper.

Such concepts have been developed over the ages in India and one of the greatest philosophers of the modern world, Max Muller in his article: "What India can teach us", said : "If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow – in some parts a very paradise on earth – I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant – I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only but a transfigured and eternal life – again I should point to India."[1]

About this mainstream of Indian culture and which is continuing through the ages, Dr. K. M. Munshi in his essay, "Pilgrimage to Freedom" correctly summed up: "Indian Culture is a living force. It absorbs alien elements when necessary but transmutes them into a new pattern of homogeneous richness. It is, therefore, a tremendous force of power and beauty which made us what we are in the world today; and will make us what we want to be in the world of tomorrow. Its vitality has been shaping attitudes, disciplines and approaches to life to suit new conditions, age after age – as vigorously in the past as in the present."

On fostering the bonds of human unity we must remember our great Guru Nanak who never allowed anyone to see him unless the visitor had taken food in the community kitchen (Langar) where Muslims and Hindus, Brahmins and Sudras all sat next to each other to take their food. This is the finest example to ensure unity of human beings. The story of the great poet saint Kabir also points to the same direction. When Kabir died, both the Hindu and Muslim community claimed his body as both the community leaders claimed that he belonged to their community and they wanted to perform his last rite according to their religious traditions. When they came to take charge of the earthly remains of Kabir, both the groups discovered that there was only a heap of flowers under the cloth that covered his body. This shows how Kabir was the divine weaver of the hearts of men and how he had transformed old hatreds into the threads of love.

In my humble view, there are five virtues which can lead human unity in this world. They are: (1) Satya, (2) Dharma, (3) Shanti, (4) Prema and (5) Ahimsa.

I am afraid that for none of these Sanskrit words there is an equivalent expression in English language. In fact one English

word cannot precisely encapsulate the wealth of thoughts expressed by each of these Sanskrit words. Satya does not only mean the truth, it also implies intellectual integrity being true to oneself and having the courage to act according to one's concept. Religion also does not fully express the concept of Dharma. Dharma means so many values and it would mean nobility, righteousness, proper conduct and above all a philosophy of life which makes one a worthy citizen of the world. It is obedience to higher values which may not be enforceable by law. That is why India survived for centuries without any Central Government or an authority but She survived on the strength of her cohesive ideal of Dharma. Similarly Shanti does not mean peace alone but it transcends peace. It signifies the calm of the mind, the serenity, total stability within oneself which enables a person to discover peace in soul before the person dies. Prema is not merely love but it takes within its fold the virtue of compassion and understanding. Prema is the greatest force in this world which cannot be substituted by anything else and which holds human beings together. The Indian concept of the world being one family is different from the present concept of globalization. This concept of the world being one family becomes a reality when Prema is universally accepted as the inviolable principle of human behaviour. And in Ahimsa, there is more than non-violence. When one practices Ahimsa there is a feeling of kinship, of oneness with life, with all fellowmen, animals, birds and trees. That is why when Dr. Albert Einstein's Birth Centenary was observed in 1979, Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the world renowned Physicist of the USA said, "If I had to think of a single word for his attitude towards human problems, I would pick up the Sanskrit word Ahimsa." Ahimsa is not just a creed but a way of life. These great values can exist only if the society is equal. In a deeply unequal society where divisiveness is the order

of the day none of these values can exist. We cannot just shut our eyes to the present scenario and glorify these values in a vacuum. So we must understand who are responsible for making the society unequal by dividing them on various artificial barriers. Here Swamiji gives the answer-- "Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country under foot, till they became helpless, till under this torment the poor, poor people nearly forgot that they were human beings. They have been compelled to be merely hewers of wood and drawers of water for centuries, much so, that they are made to believe that they are born as slave, born as hewers of wood and drawers of water. With all our boasted education of modern times, if anybody says a kind word for them, I often find our men shrink at once from the duty of lifting them up, these poor down-trodden people. Not only so, but I also find that all sorts of most demonical and brutal arguments, culled from the crude ideas of hereditary transmission and other such gibberish from the Western world, are brought forward in order to brutalize and tyrannise over the poor all the more."[4]

What was said by Swamiji more than a century back is still true and our society has not changed much. In such a deeply divided and unequal society the talk of human unity is bound to sound vapid and anaemic. I have deeply thought over this situation and several times asked myself whether there can be any unity between the perpetrator and the victim, between the oppressor and the oppressed. I have never found the answer in the affirmative. In this context may I refer to an incident in the life of Swamiji himself. After the sudden demise of his father, Swamiji being the eldest son, was thrown in serious financial distress. In his own words, "I went about heither and thither in search of a job even before the period of mourning was over." On that day, suffering from hunger and fatigue, he was resting in

the shade of Ochterlony Monument in the Maidan. A friend of his who was with him in trying to console him, sang a song with the following lines: "Here blows the wind, the breath of Brahman, His grace palpable." Hearing this song, the reactions of Swamiji was very pertinent to understand his mind. Swamiji said, "When I heard I felt as if he was inflicting severe blows on my head. Remembering the sheer helpless conditions of my mother and brothers, I burst out in resentment, despair and disappointment, "shut up". Those who are in the lap of luxury and do not know what the pinch of hunger means and those whose nearest and dearest ones are not starving and going naked – to such people, in the midst of fullest enjoyment of life, such flights of imagination appear sweet and pleasing. I also had such days and felt similarly but now confronted with stern reality all these sentiments seem to be terrible mockery."[5] Swamiji felt that disparity in financial status can never bring about any social growth far less the salvation of the soul. He always asserted that human unity can be achieved only by improving the lot of the underprivileged. From this realization he said, "I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for."[6]

He summed it up in one sentence by saying, " First bread and then religion."[7]

In 1990 in Paris he met some revolutionaries and was considerably influenced by them and announced : „Socialism or some form of rule by the people, ... is coming on the boards and I am a socialist.[8]

He openly said that the only hope of India lies in the masses and he considered them the only moving force in society. Even the divide between Hindus and Muslims which created so much

tension and hatred among two communities leading to partition of India and for which both the countries are still suffering, was the result of oppression by the rich over the poor, according to Swamiji. He traced the genesis of this divide by unerringly pointing out: "Why amongst the poor of India are so many Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say they were converted by the sword. It was to gain their liberty from the .... Zamindars and from the ...priests. And as a consequence you find in Bengal there are more Mohammedans than Hindus amongst the cultivators, because there were so many zamindars there. Who thinks of raising these sunken down-trodden millions? A few thousand graduates do not make a nation, a few rich men do not make a nation. Ninety per cent of our people are without education – who thinks of that ?"[9]

In his view, freedom from this abominable state of human life lies by having faith in one's self. Faith in one's self is the basis of Vedanta but this has not been carried into practice. If the masses are enthused with self-confidence and given the liberty they deserve, then India of Swamiji's dream will arise out of the huts and hovels of the working class. But that was not done by the propertied class, as, Swamiji found, in their own interest. In the analysis of Swamiji, we find: "Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the pathof misappropriation of wealth, etc. by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge. The second question is, those who say that if the ignorant and the poor be given liberty, i.e. full right to their body, wealth, etc. and if their children have the same opportunity to better their condition and acquire knowledge as those of the rich and the highly situated, they would become perverse – do they say this for the good of the society, or blinded by their

selfishness? In England too I have heard, "Who will serve us if the lower classes get education?"[10]

Gandhiji, the Father of the Nation, was also of the view that the disparity between the rich and the poor makes it impossible for the society to become non-violent and peaceful. In his Biblical language, Gandhiji made this very poignant.

"The contrast between the rich and the poor today is a painful sight ... A non-violent system of Government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby, cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land ... A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day, unless there is voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good."[11]

Today in free India, the number of palaces in New Delhi and other capital cities of India have multiplied geometrically and are shinning, both in their splendour and majesty, and the slums of the poor have become more dirty and dingy. Therefore in such a situation, the concept of human unity is almost a teasing illusion. In the present situation of our country, the position which was criticized by Swamiji in his fiery speeches has remained the same. The ruling class does not want the common man to improve their lives to become self-reliant and self-independent. Therefore, the seeds of discord are preserved and nurtured under the present set up. Even though in our Constitution, the National Charter, an equal and fraternal society has been promised and various provisions have been made for ushering in a just social order, its implementation is still a far cry. As of date, we witness corruption in high places and find signs of mal governance and non governance galore. The voice of people against such

oppressive measures is often gagged by repressive state machinery.

Judiciary does not always appreciate the same at times for its burden and sometimes because of lack of perception and initiative on its part.

Common man is virtually helpless. In this present scenario each one of the right thinking person has a duty to discharge. Let us resolve in the name of Swamiji to discharge such duties that will eradicate the evils of disunity in society. Therefore we must take a pledge that :

a) All of us must lend our full strength and support to those who are honestly discharging their duties.

b) All of us, irrespective of our station in life, should discharge our duties conscientiously and fully.

c) All of us must avoid all those who are corrupt and dishonest and are trying to disrupt the social fabric.

If we succeed in doing so, then only we can pay homage to human unity and the ideals of Swamiji will be realized. Thank you, for your patience and courtesy.

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# Vote of Thanks

## Saroj Ghose

Most revered Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, revered Swami Sarvabhutanandaji Maharaj, Hon. Justice Asok Kumar Ganguly, respected Prof Aswini Kanta Ray, respected Prof Radharaman Chakrabarti, respected monks of the Ramakrishna Order, ladies and gentlemen, while talking about human unity Swami Vivekananda said, "Call it God, Love, Spirit, Allah, Jehovah—it is the same unity that animates all life from the lowest animal to the noblest man". Today modern science is searching for the unification of all forces in nature to explain this universe in terms of a single set of rules. More than hundred years ago, Swami Vivekananda pointed out, "The end and aim of all science is to find the Unity, the One out of which the manifold is being manufactured, that One existing as many".

Swami Prabhanandaji, in his Keynote Address in this seminar, highlighted the significance of religion embodying the essence of spirituality, inter-connection between religion and morality in life to build a corruption-free society, need of the society for sustainable values, realisation of the vedantic ideas for the solidarity of man, and the concept of One against separatism. We would thank Swami Prabhanandaji for setting the tune of this seminar in his Keynote Address.

We thank Prof. Aswini Kanta Ray for his illuminating Inaugural Address in which he dealt with the inter-relationship between Human Unity and Movement of Democracy, on the dialogue of civilisations in which the East and the West will have a mutual give and take approach, and on the possibility of globalizing democracy even in the non-western world.

Hon. Justice Asok Kumar Ganguly delivered his Presidential Address on Indian ideas of cultural plurality, on five basic concepts of Human Unity-satya, dharma, shanti, prema, and ahimsa. Justice Ganguly stressed the point that there could be no unity between the victims and the perpetrators, between the good and the evil. Human Unity could therefore, be reached only by eradication of the evils from the society. Thank you very much Justice Ganguly.

I would like to thank Prof. Radharaman Chakrabarti for summarising the theme of the seminar in the most eloquent manner. I would also thank the Monks of the Ramakrishna Order for their gracious presence. Thanks are due to the participants of this Institute for organising the event and to all of you, ladies and gentlemen, for your participation in the programme.

At the end I want to make a very special mention about a sannyasi maharaj who held the steering of this institute for the last couple of years and organised many special events like this with unparalleled success. While following the footsteps of his illustrious predecessors like Swami Lokeshwaranandaji and Swami Prabhanandaji, he mobilised behind him the entire workforce from the members of the management committee, to the resident monks and all participants of this institute and the devotees like you. On behalf of all of you, I would thank Swami Sarvabhutanandaji, thank you Maharaj.

And thank you all.

# First Academic Session

# East and West in Swami Vivekananda's Vision : A Dynamic Harmony

Swami Atmarupananda

## Introduction : Locating the Topic in Time and Space

There is evidence of contact – trade and travel – between India, Africa (including Egypt), and the Eastern Mediterranean from the third millennium BCE onwards. Egypt had significant contact with Indian civilization. The Egyptians, in fact, traced their own origins to India.[1] Egypt in turn had a profound influence on the early cultural development of Crete, Greece, and later Rome – the fountain heads of Western civilization – as did the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. When we come to the dawn of Greek civilization, there is ample recorded evidence of direct contact with India. This should be no surprise. Modern research has caused us to reconsider our views of the ancient world, as it has shown that people travelled and traded much more freely and over wider spans of geography, even before the dawn of history, than had been thought possible a century ago. It should also cause no surprise since there is no insurmountable natural barrier between South Asia and Europe, other than the mountains and rivers and deserts which humanity has dealt with since long before recorded history.

There is evidence of Indian influence, through Greece and Crete, on the origins of Christianity.[2] The Roman Empire also had contact with India over a long period. After the fall of Rome in the late 5th century CE, Western Europe withdrew into itself during the so-called Dark Ages,[3] but even then the Byzantine

Empire of Eastern Europe continued to have contact with South Asia till Byzantium's fall in 1453.[4] By the end of the High Middle Ages, the relative isolation of Western Europe ended when Marco Polo went on his famed travels to the East,[5] which once again opened interest in trade and travel to the East.

Europe thus has had significant contact with India since the beginnings of its historical period. Today, however, when we speak of the East meeting the West, we think of the period beginning with the Age of Exploration[6] starting in 1498 with Vasco da Gama's landing in India, continuing through the colonial period, and lasting to the present day. For it was the Age of Exploration and ensuing Age of Colonization that brought extensive and enduring face-to-face contact between the cultures of the East and those of the West, culminating today in the Age of Technology, which has democratized cultural exchange: everyone with a television or internet access has the opportunity to be in contact with the world at large.

Hence, when we speak in this paper of the encounter between the East and the West, we are speaking largely of the last five centuries of contact. Largely because ancient Greece and Rome continue to live in modern Western civilization, as Swami Vivekananda noted, and the Eastern influences on ancient Greece and Rome therefore continue as living influences as well; we therefore can't draw a hard and fast line of separation as our lines of demarcation are quite porous. Nonetheless the porous lines are there and sufficiently visible to allow us to speak meaningfully, if cautiously, of limited periods of time and geography.

By the 'West' we mean Europe, as well as the European-based cultures, such as that of America and Australia. And by 'East' we mean generally the dominant cultures of South and Southeast Asia as well as the Far Eastern cultures of China,

Japan, and Korea, plus the countries under their cultural influence. More specifically, however, when we speak of the 'East' in this paper, we will focus on the region of cultural India because, until modern times, India was never a united nation-state. Cultural India at times stretched as far west as Afghanistan and at times as far east as Indonesia, but for the last five centuries of intense East-West contact it has remained largely rooted in Greater India – modern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

## General Thoughts on the Encounter of East and West

There is a wide spectrum of thought regarding the prospects of this encounter.

One side was famously expressed by Rudyard Kipling, who said, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."[7] This, with some qualification and greater psychological subtlety, seems to express the basic view of Carl Jung, who felt that immersion in Eastern culture and spirituality is dangerous for Western minds, as the Eastern collective unconscious is differently organized and 'populated' with different archetypes and racial memories from the Western.

A diametrically opposite view was expressed to me (in rejection of ideas expressed in a paper I had presented) by two participants at an international symposium on philosophy at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in January 1995. They said that the whole idea of an 'East' contrasted with a 'West' was an unfortunate result of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, that the whole abstraction of an 'East' and a 'West' was a fallacy: people are not different. The idea they expressed seemed to be – and I hope that I am doing it justice – that cultural differences are not much deeper or more significant than one person preferring Thai food and another preferring Mexican.

One likes to wear a sari and another likes to wear a skirt and blouse. So what? People can always change clothes or learn to like another food.

Let me first address this second attitude. It is simply unfounded to blame Swami Vivekananda for fostering this idea of an 'East' contrasted with a 'West'. That, I hope, needs no refutation, in spite of the fact that it was expressed by scholars. I'm quite sure that, were they here to defend themselves, the two scholars would argue that they had not meant it to be phrased so bluntly, and I think that is true: the bluntness was a way of being emphatic. Nonetheless, even a softer, more qualified version is not more defensible. One has only to do a google-search on 'East versus West' to see how little Vivekananda had to do with originating or perpetuating or popularizing this idea.

Further, it is hard to imagine how anyone who has had direct experience over several years of traditional Western culture and traditional Indian (or other Eastern) culture could say that there are no real differences other than superficial matters of taste that can easily be discarded. How to argue against that view is itself a mystery, because the view itself indicates that there is a disconnect in experience. So I'll leave this second view as an extreme that doesn't need serious attention.

The first view, expressed so memorably by Rudyard Kipling, is also untenable, and Kipling himself probably never held it to be absolute: the further lines of his poem indicate that. It is manifestly untenable because of what we indicated at the beginning of this paper: mutual influence between East and West has happened since the dawn of history, if not before. When we look at the so-called golden periods that occur in the history of different countries, we find that such golden periods have often occurred when foreign influences entered into a country – new ideas and/or new technologies. The host country was either

inspired or challenged by the encounter and had to expand its conceptions and practices in order to accommodate the new influences, which led to a new configuration of ideas and values. That in turn inspired a cultural flowering. Witness the European Renaissance.

However, we find ourselves with these two opposed views, neither of which is tenable, and then a range of views in between, a middle ground which expresses the view on the one hand that, though different, East and West have more or less of value for each other, and on the other that they have more or less distinctiveness that *should* be, or *cannot* but be, preserved.

## Swami Vivekananda's General Stance

Even a cursory reading of the Swami shows that he holds a spot in this middle ground. There are very real differences between the East and the West; not just differences of taste but differences in values, differences in world view, differences in self-image, differences in perception of time and space, differences in the approach to life's problems. These are all big-picture differences, but the Swami saw how these larger issues express themselves as much more particular cultural differences – manners, dress, and other customs, social institutions, and traits of character. And this is a critical point: the Swami didn't see the small cultural differences as simply insignificant matters of changeable taste. He saw them as expressions of deeper, more fundamental differences stemming from the big-picture differences.

For example, when the Swami trained his Irish disciple Sister Nivedita to work among the women of India, he insisted her to become an Indian even in the details of her daily life. She relates how she was expected even to wash her hands in the traditional way, not by using soap but by using pulses and lemon juice.

When, however, she was about to return to England for a visit, he told her that, while in the West, she should go back to her Western ways of life and forget for the time being the Indian. Similarly he ridiculed the manner of dress he found among many educated Bengali men of his day; their mixing of Indian and western dress, wearing a dhoti with a western shirt and jacket, or a kurta (panjabi) with western trousers and boots. He thus always showed a deep respect for the integrity of each culture.

Did he then see East as East and West as West "and never the twain shall meet"? Certainly not. First, he saw a common humanity underlying all cultures. It is only against that background of unity that cultural diversity or individual diversity can be understood. Differences are not absolute since they are different manifestations of a higher unity. Therefore knowledge, experience, wisdom, as well as the methodologies and technologies invented by different cultures, all are shareable.

And yet, he never lapsed into a lazy and hazy "we're really all the same" sentimentality. His view was that of the Vedas, which valued both the unique and the universal.[8] That is, there is an ultimate unity that underlies all diversity, but diversity – the uniqueness of every particular – is also respected. One particular cannot be reduced to another particular, but both can be reabsorbed into the universal. The Swami respected difference, but saw it as rooted in the universal.

We have just said that he saw a universal humanity behind all cultures, which allows for sharing, but at the same time we have also said that he respected difference, where one particular cannot be reduced to another particular. So what is the nature of the sharing he believed to be possible?

He expressed it in one word- assimilation. Let each culture assimilate the best of the others, but let it maintain its own character. A plant, as he would say, takes up water and nutrients

from the soil and carbon dioxide from the air, but it doesn't become soil, water, and air. It converts them into its own substance.[9] Similarly each culture must assimilate the best of other cultures yet retain its own individual life. He favoured assimilation, but abhorred imitation.[10]

## The Need for Diversity

It is well known in the modern study of ecology that biological diversity is needed. At the individual level, intra-familial propagation of a species, such as brother reproducing with sister, is a recipe for disaster – genetic weaknesses become reinforced. For the same reason, at the species level, if the number of representatives of a species shrinks too much, there isn't enough genetic diversity to sustain a healthy population. At the far more complex level of ecology, a great diversity of species is needed to sustain an ecological system. It is the vast complexity of relationships among the great diversity of species that makes it a web of life – a system which is self-sustaining *because* of its diversity. Life is found in diversity. Therefore Swami Vivekananda said, long before there was an ecological science: "Variation is the sign of life. Sameness is the sign of death."[11]

This same idea can be extended, and was done by Vivekananda, who saw the need for diverse individuals to make up a vibrant society, the need for diversity of thoughts and opinions, diversity of cultures and societies. As he often said, it is the clash of thought with thought that produces thinking: if all people thought the same thought, thought itself would die. And this same principle can be extended even more broadly, for example to languages. For more than a century there have been movements to produce a universal language which would allow us all to speak the same tongue and thereby reduce misunderstandings. Yes, if that is a secondary language used just

for intercommunication around the world, fine; but if it is proposed as a replacement for other languages, it will never work: it is the diversity of languages that shows the health of language itself, as language is the DNA of thought.

On observing Europe in 1900, the Swami said, "All Europe is gradually taking up that same style of dress, and that same mode of living! It is a law of nature that such are the symptoms of death! By hundreds of years of drill, our ancestors [in India also] have so fashioned us that we all clean our teeth, wash our face, eat our meals, and do everything in the same way, and the result is that we have gradually become mere automata; the life has gone out, and we are moving about, simply like so many machines! Machines never say 'yea' or 'nay', never trouble their heads about anything, they move on 'in the way their forefathers have gone', and then rot and die. The Europeans too will share the same fate!"[12]

## The Life of a Culture

The Swami believed that at the heart of each culture is an ideal which is the very source of its life. Each country, each culture, has its ideal for which it lives.[13] If the ideal is healthy and clear, the culture is vital. If the ideal is weakened, or rather its hold on the ideal is weakened, the society is devitalized. And if the ideal dies for the culture, so eventually does the society, once its momentum has run down.

As he said many times, from the very dawn of history that Indian civilization had chosen God as its ideal. By "God" he meant spirituality, not a particular concept of God. He declared that "each nation has its own peculiarity and individuality with which it is born. Each represents, as it were, one peculiar note in this harmony of nations, and this is its very life, its vitality. In it is the backbone, the foundation, and the bed-rock of the national

life, and here in this blessed land [of India], the foundation, the backbone, the life-centre is religion and religion alone."[14] He foresaw that western ideas of materialism, enjoyment, democracy, social freedom, self-expression, competition would shake India to its foundations, but he said that as long as India held to her ideal, she would withstand all the shocks of change, and rebound with renewed – in fact, previously unparalleled – national vigour.

From its inception as a nation America, as another example, chose democracy as its national ideal: that is, the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. America may have sinned many times against its own ideal, as has every nation, but even her failings have to be understood in terms of the ideal. In India, as the Swami pointed out, even if you want to gather a band of thieves, you need some bogus religious justification for it to be successful. And in America, if you want to enslave another, you have to justify it with bogus claims to democracy: "This is a free country, and I should be free to own a slave if I want to." That is an all too obvious contradiction to any sensible person, but it is a contradiction trying to hide behind the ideal itself, and one that was actually used by slaveholders as an excuse.

But this also shows us the route to assimilation. Mixing and assimilating, as we all know, are two different processes. Assimilation is the taking in of an outside influence and transforming it into one's own substance. The host is thereby enhanced and strengthened, and the introduced element is transformed. A mixture simply dilutes both substances. A grafting also is quite different from assimilation. In a grafting of one element onto another, both elements continue their individual lives, except that one lives off of the other. And imitation, of course, is the worst of all, as the imitator loses his own nature yet fails to actually assume the essential nature of the other: it is all appearance and no substance.

## The Foundation of His Vision

Let us briefly look at the foundation of Swami Vivekananda's vision of a dynamic harmony between the East and the West.

Sister Nivedita said that one of the great ideas with far-reaching consequences contributed by Swami Vivekananda to world religious thought was the "doctrine that the many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes."[15]

To understand this statement, let us first look at Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on the state of *vijñâna* or 'special knowledge'. This refers to what he described as a state that comes after the direct experience of Brahman, an experience usually considered to be ultimate, which is beyond time, space, and causation. In the experience of the Absolute, the world and all possible worlds, the mind and all that belongs to the mind, Gods and Goddesses and their realms, all disappear and the inexpressible, silent, nondual truth is revealed. But *vijñâna,* Sri Ramakrishna said, is a higher state in which, after returning from the Absolute and seeing the world of form once again, one experiences directly – not conceptually – that this realm of name and form is the same Reality. There is then not even the subtle duality of Brahman and Maya, nothing to reject as ignorance, no separate Absolute to strive after. This, he said, is the highest realization.

Swami Vivekananda is generally recognized as Sri Ramakrishna's messenger to the world at large, and Sri Ramakrishna himself saw him as such. So one would expect that Swami Vivekananda would have a lot to say about this state of *vijñâna* which Sri Ramakrishna had so emphasized. But if you do a word-search for it in the Swami's *Complete Works*, you don't find any discussion of the word used in that sense. I've never seen anyone comment on this strange lapse, though perhaps they have.

I would propose that almost everything that Swami Vivekananda taught was an explanation of *vijñâna*, without naming it as such. And it is this that the Swami was alluding to in the last quote from Sister Nivedita.

There is much that can be said about this, but for our present purposes let me say that every great teacher – Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Shankaracharya, and others – has taught a state of illumination, and a path leading thereto. And the path always, in some way or another, includes an effort at approximating the state of illumination as a practice: *believing* that God is listening to one's prayer, though one has no such experience, or *acting* as if one is motivated by compassion, though one feels little of it, or *trying* to surrender to God, though one neither sees God nor feels surrender, or *thinking* that one is the infinite Self, though all one's present experience claims otherwise. The case with Swami Vivekananda is no different: he taught the state of *vijñâna*, without using the term, and then taught us to try and live that by approximating it. "Don't seek for [God], just see Him."[16] "The very idea of God is love. Seeing a cat loving her kittens, stand and pray. God has become manifest there; literally believe this."[17] "The absolute God of the universe, the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, is impersonal principle. You and I, the cat, rat, devil, and ghost, all these are Its persons – all are Personal Gods."[18] "I am in the sun, the moon, and the stars. I am with God and I am in all the gods. I worship my Self. … I am the man that is going to be hanged. I am all the wicked. I am getting punished in hells. That [also] is fun. This is the goal of philosophy [to know that I am the Infinite]. Aims, motives, purposes, and duties live in the background. …"[19]

## His Dynamic Harmony

Coming back to the East meeting the West, this is the foundation of what I've called his dynamic harmony: the vision of

the divine within everything, and the respect for everything, nay worship of everything, which results from that vision. The Swami famously said that "I may have to be born again because I have fallen in love with man."[20] The Swami was the first great spiritual teacher of the world who loved everything that pertained to Man. In tune with that, he had a 'hands off' attitude towards the countries and cultures of the world. Give them truth in the form of principles, remove obstacles from their growth, but let them do the growing on their own, according to their own law of inner growth, thus respecting the distinctiveness of each culture.

This is dynamic harmony.It is not a harmony based on a sentimental appreciation for the 'cuteness' of all cultures, not a harmony based on making one monolithic world culture where everyone understands everyone else because they do everything in the same way, not a tenuous harmony based on political pacts and not to attack each other because such peace is in their own self-interest. It is dynamic for at least three reasons: One, it is based on the vision of the divinity of Man, and how that latent divinity is seeking to manifest itself in various cultures through a variety of ideals. Two, it recognizes that through a process of assimilation, we can learn from everyone: "Man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth,"[21] and so we can find truth everywhere. Three, as with all of the Swami's ideas, there is nothing in what he taught that is prescriptive: he didn't tell humanity what to do, but pointed to paths of possibility; he didn't define, but opened horizons.

## Conclusion

The Swami foresaw a future in which India would be dynamic and creative once more, after a period of decline into repetitive, non-creative self-protection. With renewed confidence in her own glory and free from the thrall of foreign

powers and foreign cultures, she would become a powerhouse of spirituality that would illumine the world. She could learn science, technology, a heightened civic sense, a certain practicality from the West – not by imitation but by assimilating such knowledge into her own cultural life, in her own way, in tune with her own ideal. The West could – indeed must, for its own survival – learn spirituality from India, in tune with its own ideals. On this latter point, it is critical for the West to learn that all human ideals are founded in spiritual Reality; for divorced from spirituality, all ideals – and indeed all values – die, because the Spirit is their source and goal. But here also, the West – and each country within the West – will absorb this truth in its own way, in tune with its own ideal. So with the nations and peoples of Africa and of all continents. This dynamic harmony is really the hope of the world.

## References

1. If the Mitanni kingdom is accepted as Indo-Aryan – as indeed some scholars do – and further accepted as a Western outpost of Vedic influence, as some believe, then those pharaohs who married Mitanni princesses actually married Vedic Aryan princesses.
2. Herman, A. L., *Influences of Ancient Hinduism on Early Christianity,* Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2009.
3. The term "Dark Ages" is now not much used by scholars, but continues to be used by some for the early Middle Ages (5th to 10th centuries) in Europe. It is used here deliberately to emphasize the cultural and social contraction that took place.
4. After the spread of Islam, and especially from the time of the Abbasid Dynasty in the 8th century, Byzantium's contact with India was reduced largely – though not exclusively – to trade mediated by the Islamic Empire.
5. Marco Polo (*ca* 1254-1324) travelled 15,000 miles from Venice through the East and back, from 1271 to 1295.
6. This refers, of course, to Western European exploration.

7. Kipling, Rudyard, "The Ballad of East and West", *Barrack-room Ballads*.
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, p. 433.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 24.
10. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 483.
11. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 65.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 390.
13. The Swami believed the same to be true of individuals as well, but as this paper is about the meeting of two civilizations, we are not dealing with the individual aspect.
14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, p. 148.
15. Sister Nivedita, 'Introduction', *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, p. xv.
16. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 29.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
18. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, pp. 133-34.
19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 472.
20. Burke, Marie Louise , *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries*, Vol. 6, p. 407.
21. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, p. 17.

# Expectations of Vedanta: Why has Swami Vivekananda's Message Appealed to Individuals in the West?

Gwilym Beckerlegge

## Introduction

In spite of the remarkable nature of Swami Vivekananda's life and his impact on the century and a half since his birth, when we try to recapture imaginatively the span of his lifetime, this inevitably seems part of a receding and now remote age. Trying to look back into that period is rather like staring at a photograph of the Victorian or Edwardian era.

There is the familiar and recognisable, but also hints of a very different world with different values.

Vivekananda in a quite novel manner at that time developed what would become the Ramakrishna movement simultaneously in two widely separated regions, three, if we count the short-lived but very important Vedanta group that he gathered in London. No less remarkable than Vivekananda's own travels between 1893 and 1897 are the intellectual and religious 'journeys' made in that now to us distant era by Americans and Europeans who were prepared not just to listen to Vivekananda, but, having embraced his message of Vedanta, in some cases to dedicate their lives following him. This, after all, was not the 1960s! In this seminar on 'International Understanding on Human Unity: Past Lessons and Present Prospect', with its focus on harmony of East and West, it seems appropriate to look more closely at

**Past lessons** : expectations of these early sympathisers *before considering*

**Present prospects** : more recent responses to/expectations of Vivekananda's message as a basis for reflecting on the present

In this paper, I shall use the term 'West' very much as shorthand for the United States and Western Europe, although I shall say more about this at the close of this paper. My examples are drawn entirely from these regions, and perhaps more or different things could have been said, if the sample represented the global distribution of Vedanta Societies.

In undertaking this task, I am aware that members of Vedanta Societies are eminently better qualified to speak about making the journey into Vedanta. An external overview of the wider Vedanta community from the 1890s to the present-day, however, may offer a perspective different from the testimony of those who can speak on the basis of their particular personal experience and circumstances.

The history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission shows that it has set its face firmly against proselytism, certainly against missionary campaigns. The movement has relied on, tried to foster, a 'chain-reaction' effect whereby individuals are drawn to Vedanta, are transformed, and so work to offer its vision to others. (The image of a chain-reaction' has been taken from the special 'Santi Number' (Anon.1986:407) of *The Vedanta Kesari*). The question, therefore, of what ways, in what circumstances, and for what reasons, individuals have been drawn to Vivekananda's message, whether as in the 1890s personally and directly or as in subsequent years indirectly and through their own initiative, is highly pertinent to any consideration in 2013 of the present prospects of Vivekananda's legacy as a force for unifying humanity. Scholarly studies have

pointed out the distinctive way in which Vedanta established itself in the United States (See, for example, French 1974). It has appealed very much through its literature to an educated, older, settled audience. Apart from those born into Hindu families and/ or families already associated with Vedanta, the decision to adopt Vedanta beyond India is typically an individual decision – a characteristic of privatised religion – rather than a consequence of acculturation from birth or as a result of targeted action by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

This paper will draw on three kinds of testimony/sources:

* Looking back to the 1890s, I shall consider individuals prominently involved with Vivekananda and the formation of the first Vedanta groups whose lives and thought consequently have been chronicled in some detail within the movement, for example, by Marie Louise Burke.

* When considering the attraction of Vedanta more recently, I rely primarily on scholarly studies of Vedanta Centres in their distinctive regional settings, rather than testimony from individuals.

* In the final part of the paper, I introduce some material taken from interviews I have conducted with Swami Dayatmananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Centre in the UK and Swami Vedananda of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in which they discuss the daily realities of responding to those who are drawn to, or inquire about, Vivekananda's message.

## Starting with Swami Vivekananda

In 1896, Vivekananda delivered a lecture entitled 'Unity the Goal of Religion' in New York (CWSV, III:1-5). In it he referred to what he regarded as humanity's urge to hold to religion, but he admitted that the various forms of religion in the world presented something of a bewildering spectacle. He went on to affirm:

Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord; and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone (pp.2-3).

That unity, he argued, is proclaimed by all religions; it is 'a unity within us. Being one with divinity...' (CWSV, III:5). Vedanta, he affirmed, 'continues its search for the final unity which is alike the goal of science and religion' (p.6). Vivekananda's optimism about the outcome of this quest and its implications for the everyday world as we know it are arguably expressed in their most vivid terms in his famous, first speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Here, in a manner that was striking at that time, he greeted his 'Sisters and Brothers of America', before identifying himself with a religion that had taught the world 'both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true' (CWSV, I:3).

Against the backcloth of human history that has been marked by sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism, which have destroyed civilisation and whole nations, Vivekananda hailed the Parliament as a turning point, marking the death-knell of fanaticism, persecution and uncharitable feelings 'between persons wending their way to the same goal' (CWSV, I:4). Yet, Vivekananda was not unrealistic, acknowledging that human beings must continue to wrestle with religion (CWSV, III:1). Whether or not there have been turning points, we know that we still face many of the grave problems arising from conflict that Vivekananda depicted in his summary of the failures of human history.

To revert to my earlier point about needing to delve beneath the appearance of the familiar when looking back at Vivekananda's mission in its historical context, it is important to consider what he had in mind when he talked about 'unity'. This is a persistent theme in our record of his teaching in which his

most recurrent reference points were the inner state of the human being, as a reflection of the true state of reality, and the unity of knowledge, both religious and scientific. Vivekananda did concede that 'at first sight' there were undeniable differences within Hinduism and between religions (CWSV, III:454 f) but identified 'points of unity' within Hinduism. It was the task of Vedanta to 'harmonise' the aspirations of different religions (CWSV, II:125), which all 'have a backbone of unity' (CWSV, IX:499).

It has been claimed that Vivekananda foresaw (CWSV, III:277) the war that would engulf Europe, although strictly it is not explicit what kind of 'volcano' and destruction he envisaged. He also commented on the folly of war in relation to British losses in the Boer War (CWSV, IX: 132). But when Vivekananda spoke of 'unity' as a social issue, it was more typically with reference to what confronted him then in India – between class and caste and different religions – and at a rather different level between 'East' and 'West' but understood here as different world views and value systems, 'ways of thinking', and not as political blocs.

Vivekananda insisted that 'unity in religion' was 'absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India' because in Asia religious, and not political, ideals form the basis for national unity (CWSV, III:287), for what makes a 'race is its religion' (CWSV, IV:143) and thus 'religion' is 'the tie, unity of humanity'. In 'My Master', his tribute to Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda declared that through renunciation and realisation, human beings could come to recognise the 'harmony in all the religions of the world', which would put an end to the 'need to quarrel' (CWSV,IV:187; cf. V:190, 192). This, Vivekananda affirmed, was the message of his master, after whom 'the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past' (CWSV, VI: 335). India

is thus to 'be raised... with the flag of peace and love' (CWSV, IV: 352; cf. V:190).

In an interview given in London in 1896, Vivekananda declared his belief that religious violence in the West stemmed from an over preoccupation with the outward forms of religions and that in India the Muslims were the first ever to take up the sword. In so doing, it has to be said that he exempted Hindus from any involvement in violence and persecution. In response to the questioner who asked about the promotion of unity in England, Vivekananda anticipated the gradual disappearance of different sects as 'liberty and knowledge increase (CWSV, V:197). On another occasion, Vivekananda explained this not so much in terms of each religion losing its individuality but rather in terms of the assimilation of the 'spirit of others' (CWSV, I:24).

## Past Lessons

Many of those who significantly paved the way for the reception of Vivekananda's message in the United States and England were critical of the Christianity to which they had been exposed. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), whose philosophy of Transcendentalism, had been embraced by some of Vivekananda's earliest American admirers, like Katherine Sanborn, declared that 'the stern old faiths [pre-eminently Calvinism] have all pulverized. 'Tis a whole generation of gentlemen and ladies out in search of religions' (Emerson 1909:VI, 195).

In Britain, Prof Max Müller (1823-1900) was not a devotee and his attitudes towards the wider Hindu tradition were markedly ambivalent, sometimes sympathetic and sometimes far less so, but he played a crucial role in the international dissemination of knowledge primarily of Sri Ramakrishna and thus less directly of the nascent Ramakrishna movement. He met

Vivekananda in Oxford and corresponded with him. Aptly described as an 'eirenic enthusiast', one for whom 'the attempt to understand religion was an attempt to understand man, and an attempt, too, to persuade men to understand one another' (Sharpe, 1975, p. 44), Müller came to identify with the 'Broad Church', the liberal wing of the Anglican church, playing on this label 'broad' when he wrote '...my conviction has always been that we could not be broad enough' (Müller, 1901, p. 291). Not unsympathetic to either British rule in India or to the Christian missionary enterprise, as long as this was constructive and reformist, Müller resisted attacks on other religions, memorably declaring 'All religions are mere stammerings, our own as much as that of the Brahmans' (Müller, 1902, Vol. II, p. 491). Towards the end of his life he said 'I know of no better preparation for it [death] than the Vedanta philosophy' (Müller, 1894a, p. 8), which was acknowledged by Swami Vivekananda (CWSV VIII: 337, 342) in 1895. Above all, in an early article and then book, Müller appeared to be searching for a common ground on 'which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being' (Müller, 1899, p. x).

It is perhaps hardly surprising that many of those first attracted to Vivekananda in the United States and London of the 1890s, who spoke of themselves rather like travellers in a desert finally finding an oasis, were already profoundly alienated from mainstream, church-based Christianity. They found it intolerant, exclusivist, and difficult to reconcile with reason. The subordination of women intensified some of these reactions. It is helpful at this point to distinguish broadly between :

* those who became in a real sense devotees, like Sisters Nivedita and Christine and the Seviers.

★ others who were warmly supportive but never expressed any inclination to change their existing religious allegiance or stance.

★ those who for various reasons, although initially attracted to Vivekananda and his message, did not remain within the Vedanta 'camp' – some becoming disaffected, for example, Henrietta Muller who assisted with the purchase of the land for Belur Math and helped to subsidise *The Brahmavadin*.

Within this latter group, we find those whose own quest seemed to impel them constantly to search for new sources of inspiration, often highly eclectically. It is perhaps hardly surprising in this atmosphere that Vivekananda made plain that he wanted to avoid being 'run over with 'fads' from the first' (CWSV VI:342).

In 1897, Sister Nivedita (1988, II:389) wrote of an air of 'growing uncertainty and despair, with regard to Religion' and of the 'impossibility of retaining belief in the dogmas of Christianity, leading people to look for truth elsewhere. Some of Vivekananda's earliest followers in London, E.T.Sturdy, Henrietta Muller (both former Theosophists), and Captain and Mrs Sevier had direct acquaintance with India and Hindu religious thinking. Other supporters, such as the poet Eric Hammond and Isabel Margesson accommodated Vivekananda's message within existing personal philosophies already sympathetic to the notion of a universal truth manifested constantly in different religions (His Eastern and Western Admirers, 1983: 291f., 380; cf. Beckerlegge, 2000: 158-160).

Sister Nivedita, 1982: 20) referred to the 'equal truth of all religions' as the 'master-thought' to which Vivekananda constantly returned in his talks in London in 1895 and 1896. She declared 'The doctrine that while no one religion was true in the way commonly claimed, yet all were equally true in a very real

way, was one that commanded the immediate assent of *some* of us' [emphasis added] (Sister Nivedita, 1982: 21). The qualification 'some', I think, is important because in their search for unity it is clear that several of Vivekananda's early followers, for example Josephine McLeod, Francis Leggett, and Mary Phillips, wanted something akin to a more universal form of Christianity, while recognising that God was equally manifested in other religions, rather than interpreting Vivekananda's teaching as an invitation to abandon their Christianity (See Beckerlegge 2004).

What is given less prominence than the openness of Vivekananda's earliest followers in the United States and London to inclusive positions is the extent to which they were divided by their attitudes to India and judged that Vedanta posed a threat to their underlying Christian convictions. While Nivedita built a new life in India, others who remained more on the outer circle of Vivekananda's admirers exhibited far less interest in India. It is probably true to say that, although funds were raised for India, India was a more remote issue, perhaps priority, among Vivekananda's first American followers. India was a divisive subject for his British followers, provoking stronger reactions, with, for example, Henrietta Muller turning away from Vedanta and Vivekananda at least in part because of disagreements about what was expected from the movement's work in India. This would be consistent with the rather different nature of these two countries' links with India at that time. (See Beckerlegge 2000 Part Three, and 2004.)

It was after the First World War when Romain Rolland (1866-1944) produced his popular study of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna besides Gandhi. We are no longer dealing with figures who met and heard Vivekananda. Rolland encountered Vivekananda through his legacy – the Ramakrishna Math and

Mission and publications. Here we find a rather different response to Vivekananda, Vedanta and indeed to India, where the quest for religious unity and harmony is supplemented with an ardent desire for peace and political harmony. Disillusioned following the First World War and searching for a new world order, Rolland glimpsed a 'great lesson' in Ramakrishna, as codified by Vivekananda, which coincided with his own quest for '*libre religion*' and with his belief in a basic affinity between the Aryan of the Occident and the Aryan of the Orient (Starr,1971:201; cf., Rolland,1970:204). Rolland was convinced that reconciliation and harmony would emerge from differences through a synthesis of western and eastern thought (Rolland, 1970:4ff.); 'two halves of the same soul' (Rolland, 1975:315). In drawing attention to expressions of Hindu spirituality, Rolland, the sympathetic outsider, believed that he was presenting to the reader '...the same Book. It is always the same Man... Our God reborn' (Rolland, 1970:11). The role of India, the 'great elder sister', was to recall Europe from an unbalanced reliance upon reason so that Europe may learn once again to hear '...the one great symphony, composed of the thousand voices and the thousand faiths of mankind' (Rolland, 1970:4, 19).

The attitudes of a following generation of Vedantin sympathisers, perhaps epitomised in this respect by Christopher Isherwood, who similarly confronted the prospect of global war, were no less centred on looking in to philosophies that would promote internationalism, human unity and, most pressing of all, peace. Antony Copley suggests that Isherwood, the son of a father hailed as a hero after his death in the First World War, was preoccupied with the question of how he would have acted in such circumstance, adding to a strong internal sense of personal failure in other areas of his life that were coupled in his mind to his sexual orientation. Although Copley (2006: 254, 252) suggests

that Isherwood's attempt to link his pacifism to his Vedantism lacked coherence, it was en route to America that Isherwood committed himself to pacifism and it was there that he tried to seek 'an inner connection' between this and Vedantism. As Isherwood (1980:10) makes clear, it was partly because of his desire to think through his pacifist position that he sought advice from Gerald Heard. He then he realised that he could not accept Heard's pacifism while rejecting his religious beliefs – 'I'd begun to realize that the two were completely interdependent'. It was through Heard that Isherwood sought out Swami Prabhavananda.

## Present Prospects

In this section in which I come to the more recent past, I want to address three broad points :

- ✯ Religious particularism and the unity of religions
- ✯ What problems can Vedanta 'solve'?
- ✯ 'Spirituality' in the early 21st century

In exploring these issues, I shall make some specific points about the United Kingdom about which I can speak through personal experience.

i) *Religious particularism and the unity of religions*

Studies of Vedanta in the United States and Britain in the late 20th century confirm that it has been the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda on the unity of religions that continue to be most influential in drawing individuals into membership (see French:1974; Whitworth and Shiels:1982; Carey:1987). But, as in the late 19th century, some individuals have been drawn to Vedanta in the United States and Britain not to replace their Christianity but to enrich it. For some, as in the late 19th century, Vedanta has come across as presenting but another, particular form of religion, rather than realising its own

vision of universalism (see Beckerlegge 2004). This same tension has also been identified by Sreemati Mukherjee (2012:560) in her recent study of devotees at the Vedanta Centre of New York. This takes us to the crux of the problem inherent in attempting to establish a universal basis for the unity of religions. One could draw a parallel here with other traditions in the early days of their transplanting. The late Christmas Humphreys, British barrister and judge, was instrumental in establishing Zen Buddhism in Britain. Humphreys (1994) identified the related problems of how to develop an authentically 'western' style of Zen with its own, rather than Japanese, 'clothing', while not losing something essential in the process. The issue of 'clothing' is something that becomes even more delicate in the search for an inclusive unity of the kind held out by a universal religion.

This leads us directly to the matter of the context within the message of Vedanta, with its vision of unity, is now received. Here I shall say something about the contemporary scene in Britain, some of which, informed by my experience of working in the Republic of Ireland, I think would also be true of other parts of Western Europe.

The perceived exclusivism and intolerance of institutionalised Christianity, which repelled many of Vivekananda's first followers, was linked to Britain's status in the later 19th century as a colonial power. This is no longer the case. Taking the Church of England as Britain's 'national' church, involvement continues to decline, with less than 2% of the population attending weekly services. Charges of exclusivism and intolerance are more likely to be aimed at the Church of England's attitudes to women and to homosexuals than to centre on the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The Roman Catholic Church is also popularly perceived to be no less preoccupied with matters of gender and sexual conduct, even while Roman Catholics look to the election of Pope Francis as a new beginning. A report in

*The Sunday Times* (London) after the election of the new pope referred to Roman Catholic church attendance 'haemorrhaging' in every European country apart from Poland, with a crisis in the number of men annually offering themselves for the priesthood. Following paedophile scandals, the standing of clergy in Ireland is said to have become so 'toxic' that Roman Catholic priests have been spat on in the street (Cornwell 2013: 24). Today, is western Europe witnessing not so much a revolt against institutionalised religion of the kind referred to by Sister Nivedita in the late 19th century but rather indifference and even distaste?

Since the first census undertaken of church attendance in England in 1851 revealed a far lower level of engagement with the Church of England than had previously been assumed, historians have debated how 'religious' the Victorian age truly was when considering the scale and extent of secularisation in Britain. Clearly social class and education affected access to institutionalised religion. Few historians, however, would reject the thesis that the period from the 1960s greatly accelerated secularisation in Britain, not as a result of the much talked about, although often exaggerated, sudden relaxation in social mores, but through economic changes including the increasing participation of women in the workplace, the relaxation of trading laws on Sundays, and the increasing competition to church attendance on Sundays resulting from shift work, TV, sporting fixtures, shopping opportunities and simply 'leisure' as something to be 'consumed'. In his influential study of the impact of secularisation on British Christianity, Callum Brown (2001) has drawn attention to the withdrawal, progressively since the 1960s, of women from the lay roles they traditionally played in the lives of churches.

Disillusioned with institutionalised Christianity, many of those first drawn to Vivekananda were religiously literate and prepared

to engage intellectually with the claims of Christianity. In Britain today, the numbers of those directly involved in organised religion continue to decrease year by year. In state schools, Religious Education, which has been mandatory, has never had a high status and its position as an academic subject has arguably been compromised by a required daily act of worship, but it too contributed to promoting some measure of religious literacy. Daily acts of worship have steadily been turned into 'assemblies' and Religious Education has been further sidelined with constant refinements of the national curriculum and the identification of 'core subjects'. A consequence of these various changes is that a decreasing number of people have any significant level of formal knowledge of religion – of any kind. People of my generation could well be the last of the so-called 'cultural Christians'. By this I mean that, whether they are Christian by conviction or not, they retain a broad knowledge of the Bible simply through their early education. Similarly, even if not practising Christians, they are familiar with the language of Christianity, literate in the language of the dominant religion in British culture, and thus able to retain some degree of informed appreciation of Christian cultural and aesthetic heritage.

There is a case for saying that organised religion has become increasingly discredited. Over the last two decades, an increasing number of reports of paedophilia within churches of different denominations, and of the complicity of church leaders in attempts to conceal this, if only through inaction, have prompted widespread public condemnation. And, of course, Christianity is not alone among religions for attracting censure in relationship to the attitudes it appears to promote both in relation to women's place in society and sexuality more generally. The atrocities of 9/11 and 7/7 and others might well have led some to try to find out more about Islam and how those identifying themselves as

Muslims had resorted to such actions. But, I also detect a different response, ill-considered but not inconsistent with the general movement away from organised religion; namely, that Islam has put itself beyond the pale. Popular mistrust, fear, and revulsion felt by many in turn impacts on attitudes to religion in general.

The vision offered by Vedanta, I suspect, will now have to appeal, at least in Britain and in other parts of western Europe, not so much to individuals who might well be angry with, critical of, or in active revolt against the Christianity of their heritage, but crucially who are still engaged with it. There is now widespread ignorance about religion, compounded by lack of any meaningful participation in ritual life. There have long been those in society who have been indifferent to organised religion, but and there is perhaps now a more pervasive sense, not just of the irrelevance of religion, but of organised religion acting as a retrogressive force.

ii) *What problems can Vedanta 'solve'?*

This takes us to the heart of the matter of expectations. As I showed in the first section, in addition to resolving personal religious dilemmas, Vedanta historically, because of its stress on unity, has been perceived as providing a philosophy that would promote peace and reduce conflict. I want here to draw upon two extended interviews with Swamis Dayatmananda (2008) in the UK and Vedananada (2011) in the United States. As we would expect, both were acutely aware of the different challenges of offering the message of Vedanta and indeed Vivekananda as a model in regions where historically they are not 'known quantities', to quote Swami Vedananda. Referring particularly to the preoccupations of non-Indians who sought his advice, Swami Dayatmananda explained that they tended to want to know how Vedanta would work in their everyday lives;

would it help with relationships, seeking a balance between the demands of everyday life and a spiritual life, self-help, managing stress. As many would have no prior knowledge, initial introductions had to be simple and basic. Those of Indian descent would be likely to know more about Vivekananda, possible even Vedanta, and often were concerned particularly about the religious nurture of their children in the context of British society.

Both Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Vedananda were convinced that what Vedanta offered to people in the West was a religious and psychological system that would enable individuals to find depth in their own religious lives. Swami Vedananda elaborated on this to talk particularly about Vedanta's capacity, because of its power to unify, to provide a platform on which to address conflicts in an equitable, rational manner, and to heal irreconcilably differences. This for Swami Vedananda was the highest expression of *seva*. Both Swami Vedananda and Swami Dayatmananda argued that Vedanta had a contribution to make to counselling, and perhaps particularly for the elderly who increasingly experience loneliness in old age, certainly in the United Kingdom, although both were aware that this is now an increasingly technical and regulated area. For Swami Dayatmananda, inter-faith work was another important area where the quest for greater harmony was essential and where Vedanta had a contribution to make. To return briefly to a point I made above about Religious Education in British schools, I got the clear impression that Swami Vedananda found it harder in the United States to find ways of reaching out to younger people, gaining access to schools and universities, whereas Swami Dayatmananda spoke of receiving invitations to speak in British schools.

Vivekananda insisted that religion must help wherever people find themselves (CWSV II:300; cf.,III:245; III:427), and the

fusing of the principles of Vedanta with the practice of *seva* has long brought together the philosophy of Vedanta with everyday and indeed technical applications. On a recent stay in India, I bought a copy of *Swami Vivekananda's Winning Formulas to become Successful Managers* (Sarma 2010), and before that had found articles on customer-service (Banerji 2002) and management (Lohia 2002) in *Prabuddha Bharata*, which suggests that efforts are being made to show that Vedanta has a place in the twenty-first-century realities of the way in which people spend most of their working days and thus probably most of their adult lives.

iii) *'Spirituality' in the early 21st century*

Vivekananda uses the term 'spirituality' in a number of ways, sometimes as if synonymous with 'religion' (for example, CWSV, VI:9). At other times, 'spirit' is that which is distinct from 'matter' (or 'nature'), 'pure, absolute existence', and thus the truly 'spiritual' understand this (for example, VI:99). 'Spirituality' for Vivekananda referred above all to direct, personal experience that dynamised the religion being practised, manifested in adherence to the ideals of renunciation and service, and Advaita Vedanta contains the 'highest spiritual truths' (CWSV,VIII:280). Vivekananda affirmed that 'Religion is to be realised' ... 'for it is only that man who has realised God and seen Him, who is religious' (VIII:378). This is the 'great spiritual realisation'. This is in accord with what Vivekananda would have imbibed from Ramakrishna, and this is something that clearly struck a chord with many of Vivekananda's first admirers in the United States and London in the 1890s.

In recent years 'spirituality', in the words of Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, has both 'taken over' religion and emerged as something of an alternative to religion (a secular alternative?), circulating in areas such as health and well-being and thus yoga,

and education. They point out that spirituality has been appropriated by corporate bodies, management consultants and marketing.

For many people, spirituality has replaced religion as old allegiances and social identities are transformed by modernity. (Carrette and King 2005:1)

The emerging sense of 'spirituality' from the late 18th and early 19th centuries is suggestive of a more interior, individual and psychologised dimension of religion. But Carrette and King (2005) link this very shift in meaning to the process of the gradual privatisation of religion.

## Conclusion

In reflecting at this unique juncture on Vivekananda's legacy and the 'present prospects' for Vedanta, I am reminded of Swami Dayatmananda's words - the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and Vedanta are not goal-oriented projects, fixed on targets. On the other hand, in marking this 150th anniversary, this conference has one eye on the future. Transmission is an expression of the value placed on Vivekananda's legacy. Swami Vedananda in San Francisco mentioned to me the familiar concern of simply trying to ensure that a sufficient number of new members/workers at least replaces those who die or move away, while Sreemati Mukherjee (2012: 562) noted in her study in New York that 'not many people are coming to Vedanta any more' and the particular problem of trying to attract young people who might be drawn to currently fashionable ideas.

At the global level, the internet, for all the problems it has brought in its wake, provides a powerful medium through which to present the message of Vivekananda in a way that is entirely consistent with the values of the Ramakrishna movement and Vivekananda's insistence upon avoiding all sectarianism. Once

the message is offered, it is up to the 'surfer' to decide whether to take up that offer and find out more. Studies of religious activity on the internet have shown that it gives those who want it a new freedom, by providing them with an opportunity to select anonymously their own sources of guidance, to ask questions they might have been embarrassed to ask of traditional authority figures.

I noted at the start of this paper that many of the grave problems that Vivekananda depicted in his summary of the failures of human history are still with us today, in terms of the need to bring peace and harmony and a sense of justice. It is clear that Vedanta with its vision of unity has continued to appeal powerfully to individuals who seek an end to such conflict, although the greatly changed world order that has emerged since the end of the Second World War has to an extent overtaken the rhetoric of East and West. Is, for example, the distinction between the North and the South more pertinent today, or should we simply talk about global issues? The work of Vedanta societies, however, shows that people seek to combat disharmony, alienation, and a sense of purposelessness often experienced most directly and immediately in their personal relationships, in the home, in the workplace, and in isolation. This is compelling evidence that human beings still search for meaning and purpose, and, in talking as I have about religious literacy (and I mean here formal knowledge of religious concepts), I did not intend to imply otherwise. I have tried to highlight the extent to which many individuals today – and this is no longer a simple consequence of lack of education but rather of their experience of education - no longer either have access to, or choose not to access, the kind of language generated by the historically dominant religion of the West, Christianity. Reducing conflict within the individual and between individuals in everyday and

domestic settings is itself a prerequisite in tackling conflict at communal and ultimately global levels, and it could be argued that this process is entirely in tune with the image of Vedanta fostering a chain-reaction as more individuals are drawn in and transformed. Obviously, more needs to be added to any process of individual transformation, not least in terms of structural changes.

The shift in popular attitudes towards, and levels of engagement with, institutionalised religions, particularly Christianity in, for example, Britain and Western Europe, might prove to pose the biggest challenge to the promotion of Vedanta in the 21st century, or maybe its biggest opportunity. Perhaps the fact that Vedanta does not present itself as another 'religion' will prove advantageous to its role/mission as a unifying force. The use of the term 'spirituality' has grown in popularity in recent years. Vivekananda's use of 'spirituality' as a way of characterising Vedanta as a system that could lead to the core of religion might seem at first hearing to chime well with the current popularity of this concept . 'Spirituality' does provide a portmanteau word through which individuals today pursue questions of meaning and reflect on their own development. It is also now a very elastic term, and for some seen as a more comfortable alternative to 'religion' and more accommodating in a secular society. For Vivekananda, 'spirituality' indicated religion experienced directly and dynamically by the individual, and it was the nature of this experience that could ultimately manifest the fundamental unity of religions. 'Spirituality', on this understanding, is thus both beyond the confines of any one tradition while being at the very centre of each. It is a concept with which Vivekananda conceded people had to struggle, and arguably makes demands of the kind some contemporary, popular reformulations of 'spirituality' are expressly trying to

avoid. Will those who celebrate Vivekananda's bicentenary look back over the 21st century as a period when 'spirituality' took over from 'religion' as providing a conceptual basis for the quest for human unity, thus making the definition of 'spirituality' of prime importance at a time when it has lost the clarity it had for Vivekananda?

## Abbreviation

CWSV: The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda

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# Second Academic Session

# Swami Vivekananda's Unopened Birthday Present: The Gift of Listening

Hal W. French

## ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda is well-known for his remarkable eloquence demonstrated at the Parliament of Religions and in many other settings. But there is another gift which he has left for us: the art of listening. I have termed it 'inloquence,' not eloquent speech, but the compensatory quality of deep listening. Many persons throughout history have been noted for their eloquence; few, if any, have been remembered for their capacity for listening, or 'inloquence.' I will be exploring how Vivekananda models that gift in his relationship first, to Ramakrishna, to the internalized voice of the Goddess, to the myriad voices of Mother India, and to those whom he encountered in his travels to the West.

Following his example, the human community may experience a larger measure of unity through cultivating our potential to listen to the words and lives of persons in different faith communities and to hear and respond to the discordant voices which threaten that unity.

## TEXT

To all persons gathered: It is a privilege to be a part of this assembly, organized to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda. Perhaps it is significant to note that in my country, twelve days before Vivekananda's birth in 1963, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation

Proclamation, freeing slaves. And Vivekananda's life mission gave us a lasting legacy of spiritual emancipation from bonds of hatred and discord, helping to create larger measures of unity among the human community, which is the theme of this conference. In one of his Chicago addresses, "Paper on Hinduism," he said, "Thus it is, through multiplicity and duality that the ultimate unity is reached."[1] And in recognition of his emphasis on truth coming from all the great religions, let me cite, initially, the opening lines of a poem by Hafiz, the great Sufi mystic: "There are so many gifts still unopened from your birthday. There are so many handcrafted presents that have been sent to you by God."[2] There are indeed so many gifts of Swami Vivekananda that we celebrate here, and some of them may at least remain partially unopened. Tony Murdock quotes Eleanor Stark, from her book, *The Gift Unopened: A New American Revolution,* in which she says, "Although India recognizes him as her modern patriot saint and the order of monks that he founded in the name of Ramakrishna continues to work all over India in the lives of contemplation and service, it was to the West that he gave a full volume of his call to greatness."[3] And then Murdock suggests that Vivekananda's 'immeasurable gift' that he has left behind in his writings and lectures has barely been opened in North America, and that he was just now beginning to undo the wrapping for himself.[4] That may be true of the West generally, but I am speaking of a more specific gift, a matching gift to one which we have long since opened and explored, his gift of eloquence. He is known to us as a matchless orator, a man of great eloquence, especially as he first burst onto the world's spiritual canvas at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. In an article, "The Living Voice," Visvanath Chatterjee has examined in some detail the power of Vivekananda's eloquence, his "winged words," to use language

from Homer.[5] Eloquence speaking forth. But there is another gift , if opened, I think has been insufficiently appreciated. If eloquence is giving out in speech, then allow me to create a word for taking in the word 'inloquence,' or listening. They are matching gifts: no real eloquence without the developed capacity for listening, or 'inloquence.' We have no right to speak to those to whom we are not willing to listen, and Vivekananda had developed his listening capacity to a high degree. It is again a unitive gift to the human community; as we learn to listen to each other; across all the lines which might divide us, we hear the voices of different traditions, their values, their perceptions of truth, their spiritual practices. We deeply respect each other, and we grow together toward a greater measure of unity. My participation here is from a deep commitment to interfaith activity, primarily now as Chair of the U.S. Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom. I cherish this opportunity to explore with you the contributions which interfaith organizations make toward our goal of realizing our unitive visions.

Even as a child the young Naren was given to the practice of meditation. He related that he would see a bright light upon closing his eyes when retiring. He assumed that this was experienced by everyone, and was surprised in learning that this was not so. Ramakrishna explicitly asked him whether he experienced this or not, evidently regarding it as the mark of a great spiritual past and an inborn habit of meditation.[6] As this gift is developed, of course, we term it Raja Yoga, or *dhyana,* which may be thought of as a deep practice of listening.

The very term *Sruti,* referring to the most revered texts, the Vedas, means 'That which is heard.' The Vedas merit the most attentive hearing, then, the most reverential listening which we can accord to the wisdom of those ancient seers. Vivekananda

was a profound listener to these texts. He needed verification, however, of the truths of the insights of the Vedas, and he found that, as evidenced in his lectures in Chicago, the correspondence between Vedic thought and modern theories of evolution. He listened, of course, in his education, to the insights of western sages as well, ancient and modern, but he increasingly returned to the texts of his own tradition, finding his truest home in these and subsequent writings of his people. Before he was to be known for his eloquence, then, he had already developed, and would continue to expand his gift of 'inloquence,' or listening. That's my theme, and I invite you to travel with me to see how that was in evidence. And I recommend a further exploration of the theme of listening by referring you to the work of an interfaith colleague, Kay Lindahl, founder of The Listening Center in California, and author of *The Sacred Art of Listening*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002) and two other books.

How had Naren come to meet Ramakrishna? While most of his teachers in Scottish Church College had made little impression, one, William Hastie, was a favourite. Naren listened with interest to Hastie, and in a lecture on Wordsworth, the nature poet, Hastie had rather casually mentioned Ramakrishna. Naren's interest was piqued, and he sought out the man who was to be his guru. Perhaps he had also known of Ramakrishna through his connections with the Brahmo Samaj.

When he first met Ramakrishna, the young Naren was astounded by the language that he related to express his relationship with God. The familiar question that he had asked many teachers, "Sir, have you seen God?" was always answered in a qualified, evasive manner. But with Ramakrishna the answer was direct, "Yes, my son, I have seen God, just as I see you before me, only much more intensely."[7] You will be familiar with the extensive testing time between Naren and Ramakrishna, but

from the first, it was clear to Naren that Ramakrishna, to say the least, deserved more attention. All of his faculties became devoted to a deep listening to who Ramakrishna was. What was his mindset as he began to relate to Ramakrishna? He later commented, "I have heard it said that without inner progress in the practice of religion, no true conclusions can be reached . . . simply by means of reasoning; but satisfaction, at least to some extent, seems to be necessary at the outset."[8] The initial positive affirmation, even if qualified, had to be verified, then, through internal processing, or listening to his own inner voice.

Having been persuaded of the genuineness of Ramakrishna, in a later letter he quoted Patanjali, "The goal may be attained by meditating on a saint."[9] As their relationship developed, the stature of Ramakrishna was felt by him to be unique, seeing him as either as Avatar or a perfected divine man. Accordingly, much of his meditation (*dhyana)* was directed towards Ramakrishna. Again, he said, "I am Ramakrishna's slave. . . . So I am obliged to trust his words as the words of one identified with truth."[10] And through Ramakrishna, he was of course, introduced to the goddess Kali. He had an initial aversion to this strange goddess, also, but increasingly felt attracted to her, and once, after the death of his father precipitated an existential crisis, Ramakrishna urged him to go the temple of the goddess to seek answers. He needed assurance that if he were to renounce the world and enter the monastic life, his family, now nearly destitute, would be sufficiently provided for.

Immersed in the presence of the goddess, he forgot his question, and returning twice more with the overwhelming power of Kali blocking out any mundane question, he could only be assured by Ramakrishna that his family's needs would be met, though not in the extravagant manner which they had experienced before. This opened the way for a still deeper

pilgrimage with Ramakrishna and the goddess. As Satish Kapoor has observed, "His skepticism turned into faith, and his questioning mind was set at rest. He sensed the unity of all existence and came to see Shiva in every *jiva*. He learned that different creeds were like many rivers flowing in various directions but leading to the same ocean."[11] Ramakrishna remained his guru throughout his life, although he gave himself permission, as with ascetics like Pavhari Baba, to learn from others as well. Clarifying this to a fellow disciple, he said, "Unless one is face to face with the life of such men, faith in the scriptures does not grow in all its real integrity."[12] His listening to voices of the ancient sages was valuable. Then their messages needed to become flesh in the wise persons whom he was to encounter in his pilgrimage. Again, in another letter, giving further assurance, he wrote, "My motto is to learn whatever good things I may come across anywhere."[13]

This gift of 'inloquence,' then, preceded the eloquence that impressed so many of his countrymen as he began to travel around India. Having earlier been tempted to define his monastic life as that of a withdrawn ascetic, he remembered repeatedly a scolding given to him by Ramakrishna, who had said, "Shame on you and on such lowly thoughts! I thought you would be a big banyan tree that would give refuge to the afflicted, and you think of your own petty salvation!"[14] And he recalled the commission given him by Ramakrishna, remembering his words to M, "Naren will teach people." When Naren declined, he said, "Your very bones will do it."[15] These words were reinforced by news of distress among his disciples back in Calcutta, and also the word of his sister's suicide. He came to feel, listening to these voices of human need, that his mission was not that of a solitary monk, but one who was to be responsive to human need. Thus, was born what another participant in this assembly has called, "The

Universal Heart of Swami Vivekananda." Pravrajika Vrajaprana quotes Vivekananda's words from the *Collected Works,* volume four, "Do you feel for others? If you do, you are growing in oneness . . . It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God. . . . It is through the heart that the Lord is seen and not through the intellect."[16]

So, in his travels throughout India, he listened. He witnessed the squalor in the cities, he heard the heartache of his people. He met, of course, with some of the leaders, and his own confidence grew as they were responsive to the missional intensity that was welling up within him. Was there something that he could do? Reaching the tip of India, at Cape Comorin, he swam out to the rock now known by his name. "Standing outside India for the first time, a new measure of objectivity enabled him to see his homeland as never before. His arms outstretched, a great intuition of compassion began to well up within him. How, where, was he to secure help for his people? The West seemed to hold the key to the world's storehouse of material goods, but what did he have to give in exchange? India's unmined treasures lay in the depths of her religious truths. The young educated *sannyasin* felt that he could share those with the people of the West, perhaps as no one else could."[17]

Looking back on his country, the wounded giant, a plan began to take form. Perhaps a platform might exist for him in Chicago, at the Parliament of Religions. While delegates had already been selected, he had supporters, such as the Maharaja of Khetri, who felt that he must go, and provided for his travel expenses. Also, after having assumed different monastic names, he finally settled, at the Maharaja's suggestion, on the name by which we know him, Swami Vivekananda, which may be translated 'the bliss of discrimination,' i.e., between the false and the true, the good and

the beautiful. But before he went, Vivekandanda still had doubts as to whether he should go to Chicago. As he was wrestling with this decision, he reported that he had several repeated visions in which Ramakrishna was insisting that he goes there. Nevertheless, he felt that he needed the assurance of the holy Mother, Sarada Devi, that this was an authentic vision. Writing to her through Swami Saradananda, he told her of his vision of Ramakrishna's coming to him, and asked for her opinion. In her response, she told Saradananda, "Please write to Naren that he should go to the West."[18] She reported that she had also had a dream, in which she saw Ramakrishna walking over the ocean waves and asking Naren to follow him. Naren was overjoyed when he received the holy Mother's approval and blessings. Listening to their voices, sanctioning his great decision, was a vital affirmation to Vivekananda that his mission was Godsend.

Again, you know the story of what happened before and in Chicago, with the days that followed. You know of his fortuitous meeting with Professor J.H. Wright of Harvard, his almost providential encounter with the Hale family, who brought him to the Parliament's attention, paving the way for his bursting forth as the 'cyclonic monk of India.' His oratory, once more, was captivating, from his opening words, through each of his addresses. He spoke of the divinity of man, and how to make that divinity manifest at each moment of his hearer's lives. He responded, doubtless, to the words of Rev. Joseph Cook, who had emphasized the exclusive capacity of Christianity to cleanse man of his burden of sin and guilt. You know his response: "Ye are divinities on Earth. Sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature."[19] That positive message resonated with his hearers, challenged, perhaps, as seldom before, with the image of essential human goodness. But it has been heard in other voices, perhaps as part of the Swami's

legacy, as one of his birthday gifts that we have opened. Rev. Joseph Cook preached his message in an independent pulpit in Boston. But years ago, on my first Sunday in Boston, I went to hear Theodore Parker Ferris, pastor of the historic Trinity Episcopal Church on Copley Square, who preached a very different message from that of Rev. Cook. The church is historic partly for the sermons of Rev. Phillips Brooks, who wrote the beautiful Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." But on the Sunday when I was there, Ferris' sermon was titled, "The Doctrine of Natural Human Goodness." Vivekananda's message still resonates for many, and unifies us around a vision of who we really are.

There is a curious sidelight to which I ask your indulgence. Research reveals that alone of all Vivekananda's western hearers, the only one who could have met Ramakrishna was Rev. Joseph Cook. On February 23, 1882, Ramakrishna went by steamer from Calcutta to Dakshineswar as a guest of Keshub Chandra Sen. The *New Dispensation* of February 26 of that year records that Rev. Joseph Cook was one of those present, along with other Brahmos. "In the presence of all and to their wonder Parahamahansa successively went through all the phases of spiritual excitement which characterizes him. Passing through a long interval of unconsciousness, he prayed, sang, and discoursed on spiritual subjects. Rev. Cook, who represented Christian theology and thought, was much impressed and interested." [20] The *Indian Mirror* in 1886 elaborated, "Mr. Cook, the American evangelist, who came to this country a few years ago, once witnessed Ramakrishna's spiritual exercises. He expressed his great surprise that a man could become so immersed in divine spirit as to lose all perception of the external world."[21] Vivekananda did not mention Ramakrishna in Chicago, so it is an irony of history that he and Rev. Joseph Cook could not

have met to discuss their impressions of him, and perhaps resolve differences to some degree. Visualize with me that never to have existed encounter: "Swami Vivekananda, meet Rev. Joseph Cook. You should have much to discuss about Ramakrishna, and the implications of what you have both witnessed of him." It's an indulgent, a historical fantasy. We wish that it could have occurred. But it is clear that in Vivekananda's pattern of listening, it did not mean mere uncritical assent to what he heard. His message was one of universalism, validating the truths existent in each religion, and the insights of spiritual leaders in all traditions. The unity which he felt reacted forcefully to the claim of private, exclusive possession of the truth by any group, such as the Rev. Cook espoused.

But if his pattern of listening and responding to persons such as Joseph Cook was there, his responses to some of his followers illustrate his affirmation of their unique expressions of their divinity. I'd like to share a few scenes with a few of his women companions, especially Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) and Josephine McLeod. But there is one incident relating to one of the Mead sisters of Hollywood, Mrs. Hansborough, which is illustrative of Vivekananda's capacity to relate closely to western people, transcending geographic and gender barriers which might occur for a monastic from India. When he was in Hollywood during his second visit, he stayed at the home of the Mead sisters, and one of them, Mrs. Hansborough, joined Vivekananda and others in a retreat at Camp Taylor near San Francisco. Recovering from an illness, another member of the group, Ida Ansell (Ujjvala) records that the few weeks there were an idyllic time of refreshment. Vivekananda delighted in cooking for the group, making an Indian curry, showing them how to grind spices, merrily laughing with them. He was particularly charmed with Mrs. Hansborough, who was used to roughing it, having travelled

to Alaska with less than first class accommodations. "Her carefree spirit and indifference to convention pleased him", Ansell recalls. "One day when she was eating something, he helped himself to a portion from the same plate, and remarked, "It is fitting that we should eat from the same plate, we two vagabonds."[22] Once more, he could move beyond the conventional monastic identity to relate to a different kind of monastic model, relating to the free spirit of another.

This was evidenced, also, after the Parliament, when Vivekananda accepted an invitation to speak several times at Greenacre Conference Center in Maine. Reporting on it, Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana states: Sarah Farmer and Sara Bull, the co-organizers of the Greenacre Conferences were grateful most of all, that summer to Swami Vivekananda, whose talks from beginning to end, carried the prevailing message of Greenacre: of unity and of the truth expressed in all religions.[23] He slept, again in his monastic style, in one of the tents provided for young people, and rather chided the more or less well-to-do people who stayed in the inn as the Dudes and Dudines. He wrote these words after his first night sleeping with the young people: "We had a nice night under the stars, sleeping on the lap of mother Earth, and I enjoyed every bit of it. I cannot describe to you that night's glories after a year of brutal life that I have led, to sleep on the ground, to meditate under the tree in the forest."[24] The 'brutal life' to which he referred was one in which, following the Parliament, he had been hosted, generally in well-appointed homes or hotels, but it was the natural dwelling with nature which most appealed to his vagabond spirit.

His free spirit was again evident in his relationship to Josephine McLeod, also known as Tantine. McLeod's ties with Vivekananda were quite different than those of Margaret Noble, who became Sister Nivedita. With disciples the Swami could be

quite direct, after the classic guru-disciple role. Even here, however, the tradition sanctions the teacher having a regard for the particular qualities and circumstances of the pupil. The Upanishadic model is eloquent : "Narada approached Sanatkumara and said, "Teach me, Venerable Sir." He said, "Come to me with what you know. Then I will teach you what is beyond that."[25] First the listening, then the teaching. Sara Bull, who was staying with Josephine McLeod, Margaret Noble and other women at Almora in the company of Vivekananda, related how Noble was resistant to Indian culture more than the others, and was thus the subject of Vivekananda's often harsh attacks. Yet even here, Nivedita came to understand the reasons for the Swami's position. She learned that "the greatest teacher may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the impersonal vision in its place." [26] Thus she became fitted for her mission of extraordinary service in India.

Tantine, however, never became a disciple, so Vivekananda recognized her independent spirit, as he did, characteristically, with other western friends, including the Hales from Chicago. He remained close to the Hales, alluding playfully to their strong Christian allegiance, regularly referring to Mrs. Hale in correspondence as 'Mother Church,' and to her husband as 'Father Pope.' But it was not a disparaging or sarcastic reference. Vivekananda stated in another letter that he regarded Mrs. Hale as a 'true Christian,' and the quality of the communications between the Swami and this couple and their daughter Mary were most respectful and intimate.[26] He listened to who they were, and displayed no evidence of seeking to change them. So it was with Tantine. She had met Vivekananda first in 1895 in New York and remained with him more than any of his western followers till his death. Vivekananda once said of her, "She is a feminine statesman . . . She can wield a kingdom. I

have seldom seen such strong and yet good common sense in a human being."[28] While Nivedita's death came prematurely in 1911, Tantine remained till her own death at the Hollywood Center in 1949 at the age of ninety an unusually effective friend and international ambassador for the movement. Through many visits to India and contacts in the West, raising funds, stimulating interest in and among other persons, Romain Rolland- who began his research into the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda after meeting her- she perpetuated the influence of her friend and his Master, Ramakrishna. A letter to Mary Hale in September of 1927 reveals something of the personal warmth and vitality that made her such an effective advocate for the movement. She wrote, "No one who has ever been very near Swamiji or Margot (Nivedita) is ever far from me- Don't you feel this, too? . . . Life never seemed to me to be so full- big fundamental things that are worthwhile cropping up all along the line these days. . . . When one has something active and creative to do this world seems young, doesn't it? It's only the people who follow that get bored."[29] Swami Atulananda, formerly C. J. Heijblom, who joined the Vedanta Society in 1899, remaining in the movement till his death in India at 97 in 1966, has left us an unusually picturesque depiction of Josephine McLeod, in his 1939 letter to Ida Ansell, concluding with these words: "You must remember that Tantine always says, 'I'm not Swamiji's disciple. I am no one's disciple. I was his friend. . . . Only the other day I heard her say, 'I feel as if Swamiji is just around the corner.' Tantine once asked Nivedita what Swamiji stood for. She said, 'Renunciation.' Mrs. Sevier when asked, said, 'Union'. To me, Tantine said, 'he stood for freedom.'[30] Vivekananda as listener had the capacity to hear each of these close friends, to respect who they were, and each cherished his gifts to them.

To return, then, to our conference theme, exploring those features which may promote unity among the human community, Vivekananda's well-cultivated gift of listening commends itself to our attention. His gift of eloquence has long been opened and treasured. As we open his matching gift of 'inloquence,' with the anticipation that any gift opening brings, our hearts are filled with wonder at what we have been given. Looking toward the future, we find other voices, renewing his vision. The American spiritual leader Matthew Fox, in a recent book title, *One River, Many Wells; Wisdom Spring from Global Faiths,*[31] echoes Vivekananda's call to unify these faiths. In this conference, celebrating the 150th anniversary of his birth, we honour his many gifts, and the one which he has modeled in the gift of listening. The human community awaits our opening and treasuring that gift.

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17. French, *op.cit*, p. 49.
18. Chetanananda, Swami 'Vivekananda: On the Way to Chicago', *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years*, p. 11. See also P. Seshadri Aiyar, 'The Holy Mother' (As the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Saw Her, *Sri Sarada Devi: Consort of Sri Ramakrishna)*, Nanda Mookerjee (ed.), Firma KLM (P) Ltd., Calcutta, p. 87.
19. French, Hal W., *op.cit.*, p.57.
20. *Ibid*, p. 33.
21. *Ibid.*
22. French, Hal W., 'Vivekananda and His Western Followers', *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years*, p. 724.
23. Prabuddhaprana, Pravrajika , Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta, 2002, p. 91.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 93. It is interesting to note that the vagabond or wanderer may assume different styles. Nature mystics such as W . H. Davies (who called himself "Supertramp,") composed volumes of poetry in his solitary travels in nature. Vivekananda ventured often into places of great natural beauty, in California, Thousand Islands Park, Almora and other Himalayan sites. But his wanderings were seldom accompanied with paeans of praise to natural beauty, as was the case with Wordsworth, Thoreau and other nature poets. His gift was instead to listen to the heart cry of humanity, the often unspoken voices of the masses, seeking to inspire them with a positive message, to awaken them to their divine nature.

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26. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Op. cit,,* p. 282.
27. French, Hal W., *Op. cit.,* pp. 723, 724.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 729.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 730.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 731.
31. Fox, Matthew, *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths,* Tarcher, Penguin, New York, 2004.

# Human Unity and India's Message to the World or Is Human Unity the Blackman's Burden?

P. K. Mukhopadhyay

The present paper is written in compliance with the kind request of the organizers that we contribute on the sub theme: "Philosophical and Scientific Viewpoints about the prospect of Human Unity, especially human perfectibility projected in different knowledge systems." We say this to indicate that the form and content of what we say in the following pages are informed by the occasion and the theme of the seminar.

We begin here by stating that the idea of human unity as well as belief in it is very old. Yet need has been felt from time to time, in different parts of the world, to propagate this idea with necessary variation in formulation and emphasis. In the process, there emerged a number of different narratives or discourses on human unity – different in respect of approach to and understanding of, both the problem concerned and solutions proposed. We will confine our discussion spatially to Europe and America on the one hand and India on the other. So far as the timeframe is concerned, we would limit our discussion to modern age or more strictly to the period between eighteenth century and after. Unity discourses or narratives which emerged during this time may be divided mainly into two broad groups depending on the fundamental differences in approach. Certain modern narrative or discourse on human unity is marked by its mainly, if not exclusively, socio-political approach. The other group of discourses uses mainly religio-spiritual approach. This second

approach, the religio-spiritual approach, is being popularized by some liberal Hindus of modern India. Though its origin can be traced to the second quarter of the nineteenth century yet it is being vigorously applied to global social context since early twentieth century. This approach has gained wide popularity among those persons who form a substantial section of the intelligentsia of modern India and who are sort of spiritually oriented or are under the influence of some great spiritual personalities of modern India. There are many modern Indians who are largely indifferent to the spiritual dimension of the problem in question which they take to be socio-political and they seek solution for it on that plane. There are many shades prevalent in each of these two approaches and some of these shades are camouflaged and hence not very easily distinguishable. It is still necessary to highlight the distinction as much as possible for the purpose of desired clarity required in the discussion.

The first approach, the socio-political approach, is particularly strong among the greater section of modern Euro-American literati (and even laity). It is also quite popular among people of those countries of the world that came under effective influence of modern Euro-American culture. These people prefer the first approach to the second one, the spiritual approach, which the concerned liberal Hindus of modern India hold and popularize; they claim it to be the characteristic approach of the Indian culture. Those in India or abroad who prefer the first approach are not necessarily anti-religion or anti-spirituality. According to them realism demands that we view the problem more as a socio-political problem which needs some socio-political measure for its solution. They hold that it would be romantic or at least non-realistic to think that the problem would be solved by some spiritual measures. Those who take the second approach to be

characteristically Indian also feel inclined to take the first approach to be characteristically European by nature. But this judgment does not seem to be deep or sound enough. We shall return to this later.

In modern Europe and America there has been a succession of discourses on human unity. Following Enlightenment and immediately preceding French Revolution (and contributing to its happening) there emerged a discourse which may also appear to be a discourse of human unity in its own way. It is more commonly known as the discourse on the basic democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity. This discourse and movement proved to be very powerful and brought the age of monarchy to end. The second grand discourse on human unity along the first line of approach was witnessed in the wake of two world wars the second ending in 1945. The third discourse on human unity took shape between 1980 and 1990. I will mainly discuss the so-called characteristic Indian spiritual approach and contemporary European (or world) socio-political approach on the theme of human unity. We may as well begin by taking or reproducing one characteristic statement, randomly chosen, of each of these two approaches.

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A modern liberal Hindu who represents the religio-spiritual discourse of human unity "felt an urgent need for a change of heart .... And he wanted people all over the world to be made conscious of the spiritual unity of humanity. This will bring about a feeling of common citizenship and loving concern for others as also a recognition of a common destiny of humanity." "Spiritual unity is not a new concept .....the world itself is a spiritual unity. .... It is this spiritual unity that has now to be consciously perceived, realized and brought to bear upon every aspect of the

political, economic, and social life of the people of the world", "Recognition of spiritual unity will lead to an awareness of mankind as a community, a community capable of living peacefully together in a cooperative commonwealth. Recognition of spiritual unity will also provide the means of integrating, on the basis of unity in diversity, all the cultural and scientific insights that have moulded the civilizations of the world in the past and are shaping them in the present. The integration of these insights will introduce the concept of human unity and world civilization, a single civilization with innumerable facets." "India, thus, throughout the ages, has played a spiritual and cultural role consecrated to the regeneration of man and to the progress and civilization of world." "Vedanta discovered the drk as cit, or pure consciousness as the unity of all ... behind the separate and diverse phenomena of the material world outside, and all manifestations of consciousness centered in the egos within." "It is this comprehension of divine unity that made Vedanta to inspire India with the vision and practice of active tolerance and harmony, not only between different religions, but also between religion and science, faith and reason, and religion and secular thought and practice." "[A] profound spiritual vision ..... that determined the Indian attitude to nature, to the physical, botanical, zoological, and human environments, not as an enemy to be conquered, as in the West, but as a friend to be understood and respected and wisely used. As an enemy, man plunders and ravages, nature; that attitude inevitably passes on to other human beings also, resulting in wars and colonial exploitations and slave trade; it also produces serious ecological imbalances ... "The Indian vision of spiritual unity of all existence is, accordingly, receiving responsive echoes from increasing numbers of thinkers and scientists in the post-war West." (See. Swami Ranganathaanda, *Science and Rligion* Advita Ashram, 1978)

As a sample of the modern Euro-American discourse and an example of the socio-political approach to the theme of human unity, I would quote few relevant statements from the writings of a living atheist American philosopher who "hopes for a global, cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society". This thinker writes "I want to demote the quest for knowledge from the status of end-in-itself to that of one more means towards greater human happiness." "My candidate for the most distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity is our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people, and in particular to work together so as to improve the future. Under favorable circumstances, our use of this capacity culminates in utopian political projects such as Plato's ideal state, Christian attempts to realize the kingdom of God here on earth, and Marx's vision of the victory of the proletariat." One would remember what Lenin had to say in this matter. Anyway, our philosopher continues "These projects aim at improving our institutions in such a way that our descendants will be still better able to trust and cooperate, and will be more decent people than we ourselves have managed to be. In our century, the most plausible project of this sort has been ..... the creation of a social democracy; that is, a classless, casteless, egalitarian society." Rorty "discusses the chances of achieving a democratic utopia" and he thinks that "[f]or various reasons .... these chances are pretty dim. But I do not think that is a reason to change our political goal. There is no more worthy project at hand; we have nothing better to do with our lives." (See, Rorty, Richard., *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, 1999)

I think that the contrast of the two approaches is quite clear and obvious. The statements are taken from thinkers who are junior or senior contemporaries of each other. They respectively belong to the groups of liberal Hindu spiritualists and Euro-

American pragmatists. The socio-political approach or the characteristic contemporary Euro-American approach takes human unity to be a project rather than a realized fact. Secondly it is a socio-political project and/or utopia. It makes no especial reference to man's spirituality; neither does it take spiritualization of the world as a means of achieving this socio-political goal. For the section of the liberal Hindus in question, human unity, which for them is a realized fact, is not an Utopia nor can it be a project. The *realization* of this unity is the project and they want to achieve this goal, the realization of the *fact* of human unity, through a change of heart of men all over the world. They call it spiritualization of the world and consider it to be India's cultural goal. "Spiritualization of the human race is India's Mission". They believe that this is the only way to achieve the socio-political goal as is described by the representative Euro-American thinker. In short the ideal human society can be achieved through this spiritual means. They further think that this is not just the view of any stray group of Indians; it is *the* belief of India and her message to the world. They also note with satisfaction that, increasing number of great thinkers and scientists all over the world are openly endorsing this Indian message. They also selectively quote such statements of endorsement.

A large number of people among both laity and literati of India today have been made to believe these and they are seized by the idea that India is and has been throughout a spiritual culture and that spirituality is the only solution to the modern predicament, "the only way to salvation of mankind" as has been said by a great western scholar and is aptly quoted by the liberal Hindu spiritualists. I contrast to the mood and statement of Rorty and the people he represents the liberal Hindus appear to be quite complacent at least in the sense that they think that the problem has been identified and a solution has been found. They feel

entitled to be reasonably proud in that the solution in question – spiritualizing the world – is India's message to the world. The key to the safety and survival of the world and the people of it is in accepting and implementing the relevant teachings of India. It is black man's burden to teach, educate and save the fighting population of the fragmented world from impending danger of getting destroyed by conflict, violence and war. What is needed is not the search for a solution, but making man recognize through imparting right type of education – and through every possible means including public lecture, publicity and propaganda etc. – the fact of human unity, humanity's spiritual unity.

At this point let us state quickly our own position which, we hope, is and will be shared by the discerning thinkers as well as by large section of average intelligent men whether Indian or non-Indian. Those who are completely converted to the popular view, as stated above, of the liberal Hindu spiritualists of modern India, may find it difficult to imagine that there could be any other view at least for a Hindu or an Indian. For them their view is the only Indian view or is at least the characteristic view of India. There are also people, among both contemporary Indians and Westerners, who share this view; and their statements are often approvingly quoted by the liberal Hindus. Our view is that quotations in support of a position are of little use. Since, for every quotation supporting a particular position on a subject there may be found at least another quotation which makes just the opposite claim. Let me illustrate this point in the present case. It is held that in the wake of two world wars, men became acutely aware of the need to change their view and vision of progress and means of human happiness. Similarly the devastating effects of modern science and technology on the environment made them seriously concerned about growing ecological imbalances. In this connection contemporary liberal Hindus, suggest, as usual,

that the only solution is to adopt the characteristic Indian spiritual approach. They further claim that people all over the world are arriving at the same conclusion. In this context we think we should take note of the famous Lyn White debate.

The literature of this debate would be an eye opener for the self-complacent liberal Hindus of contemporary India and hopefully will make them adopt a more realistic approach to the global problems of disunity and ecological imbalance. Lyn White Jr.'s controversial paper "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" was published in 1967 in *Science*. In that paper, much to the satisfaction of the liberal Hindu spiritualists, Lyn White strongly condemned Christianity as the source of the modern environmental crisis particularly in the West. However, much to the displeasure and disenchantment of these Hindus or Indians, White did not come to the conclusion that West should turn to spiritual India for the solution of the global environmental problem. He indeed said that we need to turn to religion but he simply rejected the suggestion that the West should turn to India or Hinduism (or Vedanta) even for religio-spiritual solution. Though one of the main refrains in articles, books and dissertations of Indians today is that, modern science and technology of the West is the sole cause of ecological crisis and the key to the solution may be found in Hinduism – Hindu religion or spirituality – yet the real situation is different. Let us hear what Lyn White has to say. He writes "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our times, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view. Zen, however, is as deeply conditioned by Asian history as Christianity is by the experience of the West, and

I am dubious of its viability among us." The effect of White's paper and the controversy it generated have been summed up by a scholar in these words. "Most Western scholars followed White's lead and simply ignored the Eastern alternative. .... we must, they seem to have felt, find a way to fix Christianity from an environmental point of view, or run the risk that the momentum of the environmental crisis will cause the Western environmental movement to defect – lock, stock, and barrel – to the East. ..... For them the pressing agenda set by Lyn White was to avoid a take-over of the nascent environmental philosophy by Eastern thought." (See, Callicott, J. B., and Ames, R. T. (Eds.), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, First Indian Edition, Sri Satguru Publications, 1991). Thus they will rather have a reformed Christianity than defect to Indian spirituality or Vedanta dharma. The circle is complete [with one difference though]. The liberal Hindus sought to reform Hinduism partly to stem the potential tide of large scale conversion of Hindus to Christianity. Modern Europe is heading towards reforming Christianity in order to prevent possible defection to Eastern thought. The fact is that, most pointed assertions just quoted, show that there are many serious thinkers who are not the takers of the offer of Indian solution concerning global problem caused by Western practice of science and technology as well as trade and commerce. The liberal Hindu spiritualists have no reason to be complacent about their success in convincing the world that solution to the problem of human disunity is in the spiritual unity of humanity as envisaged by India long before. (We will find later that there are some more serious objections against the views of these liberal Hindu spiritualists)

We think that the selective quotations by the liberal Hindu spiritualists are now balanced by the most perceptive observations we just quoted. If now we are to choose between

the two approaches to the problem of unity (or better disunity) we need to fall back on arguments, explanations and considerations. Simply quotations will not help. To turn to the statement of our own position before we explain or defend it, we believe that the lesson we learnt from our past experience of over more than one hundred and fifty years is that, in spite of the propagation of modern Hindu narrative of human unity, there has not been any noticeable change of heart even of the people of India and there is little hope that there will be such change globally. All-round corruption is on the increase, and violence, exploitation and social injustices are hardly less today. The future prospect is very dim. Every indication is there that the followers of the liberal Hindu spirituality are living in a make believe world of their own and taking a sort of romantic approach to the real problem of human life. It is high time that we closely, critically and objectively discuss the whole problem and the suggested solution (along spirituality lines) which is making its round quite for some time now. The present conference seems to offer an opportunity for this. We need to utilize this opportunity as much and as honestly as possible.

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There is one point of agreement between liberal Hindus on one hand and others, whether Asians or Euro-Americans. Both the parties think that somehow the solution lies in human unity though the nature of this unity is not very clear. The problem in question has not been caused so much by plurality among the people of the world but by human disunity. There is also a large agreement among people about the result of this disunity. The result is all kinds of social evil –injustices, exploitations, inequality, racial and religious conflicts and violence and so on. We cannot evade the problem and hence cannot ignore their source either.

To say that there is no disunity, that all men are one, amounts to doing just this, it seems. For all sorts of differences – some essential some not so essential and some quite inessential – are matters of common experience and hence a fact. If we start from this point then, to offer human unity as solution leads to the natural and normal implication that human unity is a *project* and not a fact; an utopia, and ideology and not a reality. Even so human unity will have its heuristic and methodological value. Those who are not believers or advocates of liberal Hindu spirituality approach may accept this. Human unity is a goal which when reached, there will be the end of the problems resulting from actual disunity among men independent of how different people today view it or use it. It is our responsibility to make this goal an achievable goal and then to actually achieve it. So far religion has failed to achieve this goal or even make it distinctly achievable. Rather religion has brought greater disunity among men. As it has been said, religion has not been successful in bringing about a better world for humankind. (See Burr, J. R., and Goldinger, M., (Eds.) *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues* Ninth edition, Prentice Hall of India 2008 p.104) The religious reformers and the believers in spirituality hold that not religion but aberrations of religion have been responsible both in creating greater discord and preventing religion from delivering the good to society. But the same can be said by the Marxists as well. Take two cases, "the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto. Both were intended by their authors as predictions of what was going to happen – predictions based on superior knowledge of the forces which determine human history. Both sets of predictions have so far been ludicrous flops." (Rorty ppp. 201-209) In defence, "Christians have counseled patience, and assured us that it is unfair to judge Christ by the mistakes of his sinful servants .... Marxists have assured us that all the 'Marxist'

regimes so far have been absurd perversions of Marx's intent" If this is the only way to defend certain proposed solutions of the problem of human disunity then the risk is that religion and Marxism that propose such solution become unscientific or pseudo-scientific by Popperian standard.

We have considered so far one objection against the proposed religio-spiritual solution and a sort of failed attempt to meet that objection. The objection was that instead of religion and spirituality being solutions of human disunity they have generated further disunity. But the answer to the objection in terms of aberration of religion – answer which the liberal Hindu spiritualists give – is unacceptable. On one hand it turns the statement that true religion (spirituality) teaches unity of humankind and thereby holds out promise to solve the problems facing the world today into an analytic statement and alternatively it turns religion into a pseudo-intellectual discipline. Is there any other way of defending the solution or the claim that religion or spirituality alone can solve the problem of disunity and all that it entails? Selectively quoting passages in support is of little use. Do we have independent scientific and philosophical justification for believing in human unity and further believing that the sort of unity in question or its realization will be able to eradicate contemporary problems facing the world today? One thing is clear if human unity is scientifically and philosophically – empirically and rationally – a proved fact (or correct position or thesis) then disunity must be the result of our being ignorant of that fact. Related but different is the question how to decide if this ignorance is the cause of the world predicament today. Or if unity is a fact then it must have been rendered ineffective otherwise there would not have been the fact of human suffering, social injustices, conflict, war, and violence etc. It seems to be the urgent need that the intellectuals of the world should inquire if the

belief in human unity or the efficacy of this belief has any philosophical or scientific foundation and or if the ignorance of this fact or the imposed inefficacy of it is the source of the modern predicament.

It is always advisable to start the discussion of controversial matter from some agreed fact of common experience. Like various social evils and human sufferings diversity, discord and disunity among men are given facts of ordinary experience. Whether the differences among men in question are manmade or God made or Nature made is a different issue to which we will return later on. These two groups of facts are also related largely as cause and effect. What about the human unity then? The advocates of the first approach hold consistently that human unity is a *project* which we should endeavour to turn into a fact as quickly as possible to save the human world and human race. The liberal Hindu spiritualists however hold or imply, for reasons soon to be found, that human unity is a *fact*. Supposing for the present that there are scientific or philosophical grounds for this belief, the problem is unity and disunity cannot both be facts; at least they cannot be facts of the same order. If one is a realized fact then the other can at best be for the present a projected fact or a possible fact which when realized will annihilate the current fact of disunity. Thus unity and disunity can be either facts of different orders or they can be facts in sequence much like the youth and old age of a person.

The liberal Hindu spiritual approach is deeply committed to the reality of human unity but since it is not a fact of ordinary experience one's belief in it needs to be justified by scientific evidence, or philosophical consideration or logical argument. Many believers in this approach think that the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta (hence forward only Vedanta) provides required rational justification of the belief in human unity as a

fact. If one accepts the verdict or conclusion of Vedanta then one is committed to accepting human unity as reality. One must then conclude that disunity is only *appearance* notwithstanding the fact that it is a matter of universal common experience. The fact that it is experienced, though not ultimately real, makes the appearance of disunity something effective or productive unlike a sky follower which is naught or simply nonest and is not even an object of exprience. Whereas the appearance of disunity is an experienced fact or reality the unity or the reality of it remains, according to Vedanta, ever beyond (ordinary) experience or scientific reason based on experience. Independent philosophical consideration is also of no avail. All these are the confirmed tenets of Vedanta philosophy which is sought to provide philosophical foundation or justification to the solution of today's local as well as global problem as proposed by the advocates of Hindu spirituality. Their solution under refined formulation is that once men are made to know that unity of mankind is the reality they will cease to fight each other, exploit or harm each other. Men act as disunited individuals due to their ignorance. So the solution of the present crisis is not to achieve (a projected) unity for it is already a realized fact (parinispannavastu) but to recognize this unity and then act accordingly. This they believe to be India's message to the world. To educate all men to recognize the spiritual unity of mankind and teach them to live in the light of this truth is the way to rid the evils of all kinds of human suffering resulting from the false belief that we are different from others; that some men are our friends and others are our enemies. In other words give it whatever name you wish but align yourself with the teachings of the Vedanta philosophy which is the same as the teaching of Indian culture. This is the only way of salvation of the whole world. The question is how one can reconcile all these with the Vedanta doctrine that the fact of spiritual human

unity or unity of everything is not knowable in any ordinary or non-mystic way or justifiable scientifically or philosophically.

A little careful examination will convince anyone that the philosophical viewpoint about human unity which is being jealously propagated by some liberal Hindus since the last quarters of the nineteenth century as *the* message of India can hardly be defended. Besides, it cannot be, as we will show, *the* message of India. Lastly it is not and cannot be the view of either Vedanta or Vedanta philosophy. It is at the most the view of popular Vedanta. Before we discuss these points we will discuss briefly the view of the advocates of the first approach which is truly characteristic European approach (whether or not the spiritual approach is, as claimed by some modern Hindus, *the* characteristic Indian approach). We will end by discussing what has greater chance of being accepted as the really characteristic Indian approach or solution.

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Though the first approach is truly the characteristic approach of the European countries yet it is accepted by many great intellectuals from all parts of the globe. The liberty, equality and fraternity discourse of the age of reason and modernity had been a form of unity discourse. It was succeeded by the charter of UN which was also a move initiated to reduce or eradicate conflict between nations and races. Among many distinct though related unity discourses of Europe and America one that started around 1980s and became quite strong by 1990 is the discourse of economic globalization of the post modern era. (We will not go into whether post modern is actually a phase of modernity or rejection of it). The whole world is acquainted with and is affected by this discourse yet to many it is confusing and they react to it in different ways. It seems to be quite unpopular among

a great section of global literati and laity who think themselves helpless spectators or even victims of it. But many established scholars think it is not an unmitigated evil. They also hold that globalization is neither new nor is it simply an economical condition.

If we leave behind the mystical, idealistic or romantic notion of human unity and opt for the realistic and currently socially relevant idea of it then human unity is likely to mean (not spiritual unity of mankind as a whole consisting in one unitary, substantive, and cosmic consciousness principle but) "just global society". The narrative of human unity in the context of discord, violence, exploitation etc.viewed both realistically and historically is the narrative of post UN and post modern narrative of just global society or global egalitarian society. To the questions is it a fact or a project, if project what is the chance of its getting realized, how realistic the project is etc., we would like to say global society is almost a fact. Its egalitarian character is yet to be realized. Some ways have been suggested which are realistic but the prospect of realizing a just global society through any of these ways is hardly guaranteed, rather it is dim. Be that as it may, it seems we have two options, nationalism of the sort of Gandhi who was deeply spiritual and at the same time realist or internationalism not of the kind of Rabindranath Tagore but of the type of Richard Rorty, say. Under the given condition of globalization these are the ways of achieving egalitarian global society. Of these the Gandhian way entails economic suggestions which virtually amount to rejection of economic globalization. But hardly we can either stop the process of economic globalization or reverse it. Rorty's solution is to create a global polity which may be somewhat easier.

Unity of mankind can be understood in the abstract way. This often seem to be the way of the advocates of the liberal Hindu

spirituality who take besides, an idealist, romantic or even mystic approach to the problem of human disunity. The more realistic and concrete idea of (projected) human unity is the unity of the men *of the world,* which is further experienced as such. Conceived against the background of such human unity, human disunity is an actual fact, a reality and not a mere appearance. There actually obtain not only discord and disunity among men but also conflict and violence. The unity of these men, men as social individual (and not just metaphysical spirit), where society is understood both as local and global, is what the issue is. A society whether local or global is not a mere collection of isolated individuals. It is rather a certain totality of various intersecting *groups* of individuals. Such individuals as well as groups of individual are seat of overlapping identities. Even so or because of that, identities clash. Different identities or clash of identity is nothing new though the jargon like politics of identity or politics of difference is coined in the post modern era. Modern age or modernity was firmly established during the period of European enlightenment. This was the age of grand narrative in which emphasis was always on the general and universal. Pluralities were ignored. Later particularly since 1960s different identities started to assert themselves emphatically even violently in increasing numbers (for various reasons into which we cannot go here). Universalism or the universalist discourse of the post enlightenment modern era, came to be suspected as a device to cover up the practice of hegemony of bullies whether nations or social groups, professional bodies or religious denominations. The post modern age is marked by open acknowledgment, even if not encouragement, of pluralism.

The acceptance of plurality and difference does not mean, however, supporting or encouraging separatism, discord and violence. The point is that human peace and just society is to be

realized not by suppressing or destroying group identities but realistically harmonizing them. The democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity still remain valid. The utopia of egalitarian global society and the discourse of globalization in this context of the post-modern era cannot be achieved by wishing away the identities and clash of identities or by suppressing them by military power. Only civilized way is through building right public opinion through right means and by developing understanding through communication. But the clashes of identities which made such understanding urgent and necessary appear to render it extremely difficult if not impossible. It would be appropriate to quote a Brazilian thinker if for the only reason that in the condition of Brazil both the bright and dark sides of globalization are strikingly visible. Such a thinker is the Brazilian philosopher Luiz Eduardo Soares. He says "agreement on the possibility and desirability of mutual understanding and the building of peace through communication' 'has been "shaken by recent dramatic development: the revival of long repressed hatreds and hostilities embedded in ethnic, religious and nationalist identities, the growing prestige of postmodern scepticism and the fragility of universalistic conceptions."

Even independent of all these, some think, skepticism of the sort in question had to be there as a result of the lesson learnt from our past experience. Men find it difficult to believe or hope that things are going to be much better than they were; "the last few decades have witnessed the increasing inability to believe that someday we shall ever have a classless global society." Constructing such a class less society seems to have been the declared or unstated promise of both Marxism and democracy. Marxists intellectuals hoped that through proletarian revolution and abolition of private entrepreneurship such a society would be achieved. Non Marxist intellectuals and democratic societies of

Europe and America hoped that "peace and technological progress would make possible hitherto undreamt-of economic prosperity within the framework of the free market. They believed that such prosperity would bring about successive political reforms, leading eventually to truly democratic institutions in every part of the world. Prosperity would make it possible to establish welfare states of the Scandinavian sort in all democratic countries. The institutions of such welfare states would ensure equality of opportunity among future generations. Equality of opportunity among the children of a city or of a country would become the rule than the exception." (Rorty) Non-Marxists only hoped that such utopian hope, the same the Marxist had, could be realized without violent revolution and without the abolition of private property.

Marxism failed but democratic dream of technological and economic progress succeeded. However, the state of society in non-Marxist countries is hardly what we mean by the just society. For the economic progress has brought in its train wide disparity among men in a society in terms of economic power. The gap between the poor and the rich has not only reached unprecedented proportion but is increasing every day. This situation often called Brazilianization of society marks failure of democratic dream of the West (primarily) and loss of hope in men across the countries of the world. Increasing economic inequality is promoting conflict and violence in direct and indirect ways. The poorer section finds that the democratic machinery is failing to secure justice for them and super rich people of highly competitive countries and societies are funding various separatist even terrorist movements destroying peace.

The central weakness of globalization is that the economic situation of the citizens of a nation state has passed beyond the control of the laws of that state. No longer can the laws of a

nation control, to an important and socially useful extent, the movement of national fund. Now the financing of business enterprise is a matter of drawing upon a *global* pool of capital. "... there is no way in which the law of Brazil or the US can dictate that money earned in the country will be spent in the country, or money saved in the country invested in the country." (Gandhian nationalism precisely insisted on national control over national money.) Thus even in democratic countries the state can no longer be "a countervailing power ... which will prevent all the wealth winding up in the hands of an economic oligarchy". Besides so long wealth and market forces on the one hand and the need and greed of the super rich traders and business men are the only or mainly controlling power, even practice of science and technology, if not science and technology themselves, are bound to become captive. Piling up of war materials, ecologically harmful products, and gadgets that are physically attractive but culturally destructive will keep on increasing. There will hardly be any hope of restraining these developments or ensure true peace and progress of mankind or a peaceful and flourishing global society.

In such a scenario what hope can we have of a just society – a peaceful, egalitarian, democratic and progressive society? Unity in such a society is not only not a fact it is hardly a viable project. Reiterating what we have been hearing from centuries – that all men are children of God, that men are born equal, that science knows of no caste or religion, it is no respecter of difference in skin colour or religion, or that the whole world is a spiritual unity – will not achieve the ideal society in near future as it did not in the past. Do we then have any hope? Who can in this situation help realizing the dream or utopia of a peaceful society where men will cooperate and not fight with one another and will have the same or similar opportunities and so on? What concrete

means, if any, can help man achieve this? We will say now who can help the world out of the present predicament. Later we will speak of what they need to do to achieve this.

We pin our hope in the intellectuals of the world who may not be very different from most of men, may not be angels or free from temptations, greed etc; but they have one capacity which most people lack. They have discerning rationality and they have the capacity to understand the near and far off consequences of what they and others do at any given moment. They can bring revolution in the world of ideas, can build required public opinion, and can educate people realistically. Let me quote from one who is not a realist and not a believer in the social relevance of philosophy and yet seems to get the point nearly right. He notices that we "now have a global over-class which makes all the major economic decisions, and makes them in entire independence of the legislatures, a fortiori of the will of the voters, of any given country". This – the supreme power of money, money controlling even political and military power and power of knowledge – is the major source of the present predicament. There is no effective countervailing polity or political body. He notices that the "absence of a global polity means that the super-rich can operate without any thought of any interests save their own." He continues, we "are in danger of winding up with only two genuinely global, genuinely international, social groups: the super-rich and the intellectuals, that is the people who attend international conferences devoted to measuring the harm being done by their super rich fellow cosmopolitans." He himself asks the question "How can such cosmopolitan, jet-setting intellectuals help increase the chances of a global egalitarian utopia? I suspect that the most socially useful thing we can do is to *continually draw the attention of the educated publics of our respective countries* to the need for a global polity, which can develop some

sort of countervailing power to that of the super-rich." We can hardly fail to remember one modern Indian, a leftist turned Gandhian, who did not preach the doctrine of spiritual unity but suggested one common military of all neighbouring countries. This seems to be a move to the right direction and comes under the first approach which is common to modern men of India and the world.

To return to Rorty, he also pins his hope in the prospect of men coming to soften the rigidity of identity along the line of thinking of the pragmatist. The answer to human disunity is not suppression or even homogenization of differences. We need to unhesitatingly, openly and without any reservation accept pluralism and then commit ourselves to "the maximization of opportunities for individual variation, and group variation insofar as the latter facilitates the ability of individuals to recreate themselves. It seems to me that the only homogenization which the liberal tradition requires is an agreement among groups to cooperate with one another in support of institutions which are dedicated to providing room for as much pluralism as possible." This free agreement is reached by free dialogue and open debate leading to consensus among the groups concerned. We have lost either the culture or the opportunity of this free debate and dialogue which marked both the ancient Greek and classical Indian societies. From personal experience we know that this is particularly true of India today. And without it democracy is hardly a true democracy. Predominance of party politics and loyalty to party over the nation or the national culture are greater menace than science and technology or materialism. Today America and Europe, but not the Asian countries, can claim to have better democracy. It is no wonder then that American intellectuals are more optimistic today than those who propose spiritualization remedy.

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To return to the second or the religio-spiritual approach of India, we should remember that it started as the religious reform movement in the eighteenth century. Bengal was one of the major centres of this movement and in turn it was also the major centre of another three movements of the time. One form which the religious reform movement of India assumed was liberal Hinduism with strong emphasis on spirituality; religion of law was replaced by the religion of experience (knowledge) and devotions (emotion). That the view of the liberal Hindu spiritualists of modern India cannot be accepted as standard Vedanta or classical Vedanta philosophy has already been said but it needs a little more elaboration. We said that the standard Vedanta philosophy does not provide conceptual foundation or justification of the unity discourse of liberal Hindu spiritualists. These Hindus may object that we are completely wrong in our thinking that they base their thesis – that the spiritual unity of humanity or its realization is the solution of the present day crisis – on the Vedanta *philosophy* of Sankaracarya which unambiguously advocates not only spiritual unity of everything and non-reality of every form of difference but also denies the (ultimate) reality of this world including our existence in it or 'our experience' of it. Further, Sankara's Vedanta philosophy makes the non-dual, unitary Consciousness – which we all are and everything is – something which cannot be known in any standard sense, that is, in the sense in which a knowledge once obtained can be put to use for achieving certain goal like social peace and harmony in this world.

According to these modern liberal Hindus their thesis of essential spiritual unity of man is based not on Vedanta *philosophy*, not certainly on the Vedanta philosophy of Sankarakara, but on the Vedanta in the sense of the Upanisad. In

answer we would like to say first that as shown before the Upanisads repeatedly say that the upanisadic teaching is meant for a rare few who are eligible and properly initiated, who single mindedly seek not peace and prosperity in this or other world but freedom from the necessity of the worldly existence. From this point of view the use of the teachings of the Upansiads to achieve human solidarity in the local or global society would be like, as the saying goes, using highly powerful canons to kill mosquitoes. So the thesis of the liberal Hindu spiritualists, the *socially useful* idea of spiritual unity of mankind *as a fact*, cannot claim as its foundation the teachings of the Vedanta as Upanisad either. It is not the true Upanisadic Vedanta but the popular Vedanta which advocates the doctrine of spiritual unity as the solution of problems emanating from the modern crisis of human disunity and as the message of India to the world.

There is a second point also. Whereas the Vedanta philosophy of Sankara unambiguously teaches the unreality of all differences; the Vedanta of the Upanisads teach the same thing only 'ambiguously'. Before, during and after Adi Sankaracarya and his followers the Upanisads have been understood and interpreted in many different ways. It is even interpreted as teaching dualism or at least the claim has been very powerfully made that the teaching of the Upanisads is consistent with dualism which is a doctrine of difference (bhedavada). Further it can be and is said that though the Upanisads or the Veda is to Indian culture what science is to the modern Euro-American culture yet it is false and harmful to believe and propagate, it is travesty of truth to say, that monistic Vedanta is the only representative philosophy of India or its teaching alone is *the* teaching of India, that India is a monolithic culture (we however do not deny India to be a cultural unity). This is just what is being done by giving wide publicity to the view that monism, albeit

spiritual monism, spiritual unity of everything or of all men is *the* teaching and message of India. It is all the more dangerous as it amounts to endorsing, perhaps unknowingly, the Orientalist construction of India as a mystic and spiritual culture which has its source, as has been rightly pointed out by men like Amartya Sen in recent times, in the almost exclusive attention of the West to the esoteric facets of Indian culture. The advocates of the spiritual India project who proclaim that universal spirituality is the self-image of India, hardly ever take the trouble of acquainting themselves with or remembering the vast literature of dualist philosophies of India or of India's disciplines of realistic knowledge.

Due to increasing popularity of popular Vedanta every Indian knows and talks about Vedanta and Upanisad. But even among the educated very few people know of Citrasutram or Taksasutram. They do not know nor are they told about fourteen or eighteen major disciplines of theoretical knowledge or of sixty four variety of art. They, majority of them, know the names of six or nine or twelve disciplines of darsanas which speak primarily of moksa. They feel great attraction for Upansiad and Vedanta and the Gita. They rarely emphasize the study of itihasa and puranas or arthasastra or rajniti or legal treatises of the Hindus. They show no interest in the study or discussion of the more useful disciplines of knowledge in respect of the study of which there is no caste or gender bar. They all aspire to study the Upanisad made so popular among all sections of people by the liberal Hindu spiritualists. And they did this against explicit and repeated warning included in the Upanisads against popularizing the study or teaching of the Upanisads. The result is that there is phenomenal increase in the number of people who talk and admire Vedanta but for whom Vedanta says (and rightly) it is not meant. Today there is rampant misuse of Vedanta.

We strongly believe that a comprehensive or total culture is India's self-image within which both dualistic and monistic thoughts and continuing dialogue between them have their due place. Neither for the dualists of India nor for the Indian spiritual monists, human suffering, is a value. An Indian need not have to be an Advaitin or even Brhamavadin or Vedantin in order to sing in praise of peace and harmony. So our answer to the query about the prospect of human unity from the philosophical point of view is that given diversity and even disunity among men in local and global societies, desirable human unity can be achieved up to a certain point *through* human diversity itself which we cannot wish away. Socio- political prudence as well as reason often finds that sometimes diversification is the way of achieving unity in a condition where apparent unity is beset with constant and otherwise unsolvable infighting. Unity *in* diversity does not make a very clear sense to us unless it means unity based on and secured *through* diversity. Only by admitting, understanding, accommodating and honouring diversity can we learn not to make diversity an excuse for disharmony or conflict. This is the message of India and this is admitted by every Indian philosophy. In the post-modern age many non-Indian cultures especially the Euro-American society would find this culture and message more acceptable. There is better prospect of achieving human unity across the boundaries of cultures, each of which practices exclusiveness and asserting identity, within reasonable limit, in terms of the *formula of exclusiveness with accommodation*. (See Bhattacarya,Gopinath., *Essays in Analytical Philosophy*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1997). We need to further clarify this idea and give it an honest trial.

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A certain solution or message can be claimed to be *the* solution or message of India as a whole if it is admitted by all or

almost all people of India or if it is found enshrined in all major disciplines of knowledge and beliefs and practices of all sections of people of India. Vedanta as a theory of spiritual monism was not accepted by Pantanjali or Kanada, Jaimini or Gautama, Buddha or Mahavira in the past. It was not accepted by Prasatapada or Kumarila or Udayana or Samkara Misra or by Sri Caitanya, Raghunandana or even Sri Ramakrishna (exclusively), nor by Mahesh Nyayaratna or PhanibhusanaTarkavagisha or Bidhubhusana Bhattacharya or Bipin Pal or Gandhi and so on. We cannot bring ourselves to believing that these great thinkers did not understand the message of India. All Indian disciplines of knowledge and all great scholars accept Paninian linguistics but almost none accepts the theory of sphota attributed to Panini. So far there is greater chance of Paninian grammar being accepted as Indian grammar than the philosophy of sphota, or sabdadvaitavada as the representative theory or view of India. Even if all Indians accept Upanisada all Indians do not accept spiritual monism or spiritual unity of everything as the teaching of the upanisada. Mm. Mahesh Nyayaratna's work in this respect seems to be the last words.

The representative view of India must be what is common to all or almost all the different disciplines of knowledge and systems of faith or is strongly consistent with the teachings of them. The doctrines of rebirth and karma are such truths which all systems of Indian thought (with perhaps the sole exception of Carvaka) accept. It is accepted by the monist Vedanta and the dualists Samkhya, by the astika-Nyaya and the nastika-Bauddha. What the belief in the doctrine of karma and rebirth amounts to must be accepted as what all Indian systems of knowledge and all Indian people believe. These are therefore the representative views of India and her true message. One such view and message is that *men are born unequal* they have one ultimate

destiny though. This is in fundamental contrast with the modern European discourse of human unity the central thesis of which is that men are born equal. If anything has the chance of being accepted as truly India's message to the world or better the representative view and philosophy of India then it is this that men are all born unequal; it is not only a fact of experience but also a moral and logical necessity. It is something which (almost) all the Hindus or Indians believe and which people of modern Euro-American society denies. One is doubly justified in regarding this as a truly representative Indian view and message. And this is patently opposed to the unity of mankind preached by some liberal Hindus. One standard way of reconciling human diversity with human unity is that they are facts and truths of different orders. We would only create greater confusion if we mix them up.

Europe's belief that all men are born equal is not the unqualified truth of science or experience; it is not a universal fact. For scientific purposes where qualitative distinctions do not matter and where in addition materialism is the truth we may all have evolved from certain single or single sort of primordial *physical* stuff. The radical supporters of such a view are compelled to consider the whole world of diversity including human diversity as nothing fundamentally real but epiphenomena. But this truth even if it were a truth is no answer to the problem of human disunity and conflict nor is a recipe for peace and prosperity in the human world. Besides even genetic constitution of men of all lands is not the exactly the same. A deeper search into the nature and consequences of human disunity is necessary to achieve a peaceful human society. We can hardly make short of our job by wishing away the fact of diversity or owning black man's burden to civilize the world assuming its people to be all benighted, by teaching *a particular interpretation* of the Vedanta (Upanisad) to the world as *the* message of India.

To accept the Orientalist distortion of Indian culture and forging a false self-image of India as an *exclusively* spiritual and mystic country is too great a price to pay for an abortive bid to save the world from the menace of conflict and violence. In fine there are not many takers within or outside India of the solution proposed by a section of liberal Hindus in terms of Vedantic unity of *spirit* or their programme of spiritualizing the human race as a whole. As a solution of the problem in hand it is simplistic, and as a claim of being *the* message of India to the world it is false. Some take seriously the mission of teaching the whole world the Vedantic truth of essential spiritual unity of all men and of everything. They have been sincerely and vigorously preaching this message for many years now. They have been able to convince some foreigners who have converted to the faith of spiritual unity of all mankind. But they have not been very successful in fulfilling their hope of eradicating the evil of disunity, inequality and discord through teaching the Vedanta message. We see little prospect of success of these two projects. Propagation of these ideas and sincere effort at implementing the projects did not bear desired result even within the limited sphere of India. In the global context it has hardly any impact.

The so called Vedantic spiritualism of some modern Hindu liberals took its shape as a form of religious reform project in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The human unity it speaks of is a response to and proposed solution of social disharmony which consisted in turning natural (not manmade) Varna difference among men a ground for denying to certain section of people social opportunities which they deserve and could justly claim. From the Hindu point of view not allowing young boys and girls of lower varna to study in schools and colleges is as unjust and socially harmful as it is both socially and religiously harmful besides being unnecessary, to insist that all

indiscriminately should be granted the so-called opportunity to study the Sruti. India's view essentially lies in carefully distinguishing differences and discriminations of diverse sorts. We should not confuse between God made or nature made differences on the one hand and manmade distinctions on the other. Only those manmade distinctions that are consistent with the nature made differences (where nature does not mean only physical or biological nature) need be acknowledged and honoured. All realistic development plans and plan of progress should be drawn so as to ensure equitable opportunity and growth of all these sections of men. The solution of the problem of human disunity largely lies in manmade discriminations in the local and global contexts which are socially or otherwise harmful. We will return to this soon after considering how unity breeds disharmony instead of harmony. We are used to thinking that disunity leads to loss of peace and violence. But certain unities are there which failed to ensure the eradication of inequality of opportunities and harmful disunity among men. Against this background the solution proposed by Gandhi is more realistic and hold water. And there is no doubt that he was deeply spiritual as a man and confirmed nationalist unlike some great Indians of his time.

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To conclude, there is hardly one single and unique way to the solution of the global problem or that the spiritual unity is such a single, effective or Indian way. Still if any solution is consistent with the fundamental and characteristic Indian approach and understanding of human unity and diversity then it can be in that sense *an* Indian view and solution (as well). Popular Vedanta or Sankara's Vedanta philosophy cannot be *the* Indian view. We

have suggested a criterion of truly representative Indian view or message. It should be based on or at least consistent with the truth that men are born unequal. Secondly it should be consistent with India's self-image as a total culture and not just, as how the orientalists view her: an exclusively or at least primarily mystical and spiritual culture; a non-scientific and non-rational culture. Further it should be consistent with what is undoubtedly the Indian view or certain important and central aspect of it, namely that though born unequal, all men are heading towards a common goal or destiny.

We need to evolve a social system which will ensure not equal opportunity but the best possible opportunity for all different men so that their prospect of reaching the final goal is quickened. This is possible only if there is a justly regimented *global* society in which every group practices exclusiveness with accommodation. For this a global polity of Rorty's description will be necessary, but there is not immediately available any mechanism to ensure. The solution lies in or the goal of human unity (in the sense of harmony of different groups of men) can be achieved through the spread of the right sort of education. Such education is widely known to be there in local societies of ancient Greece and classical India. It has been amply demonstrated in these cultures that diversity is neither necessary nor sufficient reason for conflict where the culture of open debate and dialogue is freely and effectively practiced to great social and political advantage.

Why do we discuss today the problem of unity? The idea of human unity or belief in it is nothing absolutely new. However in Europe there were not so much talks about it before the world wars. In India some great perceptive spiritual leaders started, after their first hand European experience, taking about human

unity around the last few years of nineteenth century. They were trying to convince the world that the need to learn and practice spirituality to balance the influence of materialistic science is the only way to avert the imminent danger of growing social unrest which might escalate into world war. These leaders were born and grew up during the years of emerging religious nationalism in India (See Mukhopadhyay, P. K, *Religion: a Discourse in Realist Philosophy*, Calcutta University, 2014). They were proudly convinced that even if the West could teach the world materialistic science it could not equal India's role as the world teacher of spirituality. Since then these liberal Hindus have been preaching spiritual unity with increasing vigour and today when the world is facing great crises like demonic science and violent human disunity the talk of Indian spirituality by the liberal Hindus has become almost a war cry. If human unity cannot be soon established or ensured then the world or the human race cannot be saved from imminent extinction.

The problem is so urgent and real that we cannot afford to take a romantic or mystical approach to it or suggest as solution a wishful thinking like the change of heart of people globally through educating them in spiritual values or spiritual unity of mankind. We need to keep distinct the question whether philosophically speaking the fundamental principle is one and spiritual or it is many and material from the question how to avoid deadly conflict between existing and given plurality of various collectivities of men. Men have heard too many times the talks of unity. Imposing unity – whether military, political, cultural or any other – on the one hand and apprehensive or threatened diversities on the other get embroiled in conflict. The preservation of diversity, in a world full of diversities, sometimes becomes a greater problem than the problem of achieving unity. To put it

differently the effort to preserve threatened identities (no matter whether the threat is actual or imaginary) in a pluralistic local or global society is often viewed as the actual shape of human search for unity today. This true narrative of actual socio-political unity is to be distinguished from the grand narrative of cosmic spiritual unity or of the scientific or philosophical discourse on the building block of the universe.

Men today wait for some concrete socio-political measures to end frequent conflicts in human society all over the world. It is no use proposing or suggesting any religio-spiritual, philosophical or scientific-theoretical solutions unless they could be translated into concrete socio-political work agenda. The same is true about man-nature conflict that plagues the modern world. Some pin their hopes on two strong forces of technology revolution and economic globalization. These two forces are bringing men all over the world ever nearer to one another. It is a story of continual progress from unknown region of the globe turned to neighbourhood to now brotherhood. Soon all men will become inhabitants of one single global society. History has seen empires to crumble, today nation states are vanishing. Whatever stance they may take under local, political or party compulsions, the leaders and general educated public both in developing and developed countries know they have no power (nor perhaps any strong will) to resist or reject economic globalization and ever widening free job market, higher income and the allurement of higher standard of living. Nor do they find any solution to increasing gap between super rich and relatively much poorer sections, in a world of growing population. And this is one of the major forms of violence and sources of conflict and disunity not only in local societies but also in global societies. Apparent success in parity of fast developing countries with the developed

countries will remain confined to a small section of super-rich and urban intelligentsia. As personal culture and method of spiritual practice, unity of all being will always remain not only viable but also attractive. But neither as empirical factual truth of science nor as *the* rational philosophical truth spiritualization of the whole world is a well-founded project; nor is it pragmatically or realistically speaking a doable project. We as ordinary and affected men pin our hope on spread of genuine education (as distinct from political propaganda as well as religious sermon or prophesy) and good sense of general mass of peace-loving men; these men may not be angels but they are certainly not devils either. In a democratic world their voice is bound to prevail one day. Till then "the most socially useful thing we can do is to *continually draw the attention of the educated publics of our respective countries* to the need for a global polity, which can develop some sort of countervailing power to that of the super-rich." We can trust the goodness of common mass of people and the power of education and dialogue. These were the great sources of strength and chief characteristics of classical Indian society and culture – a culture which was and is a total culture and not just a merely spiritual culture.

The very fact that identity issue did not succeed in turning the human world into a mere conglomeration of large number of isolated human individuals is a proof or ground of hope that men can unite, can cooperate with one another, form smaller to larger collectivity by subduing clash of interest among them or among groups of them; not because they are spiritually highly developed or highly educated in the message of Vedanta but because they are realistic, pragmatic and mind both their short term and long term interests, though in all these they are guided mainly by the instinct and intuition of survival. It is in this fact that we pin our

hope that human unity may be possible. It is to the interest of all groups that inequality of opportunities is progressively reduced even if we fail to eliminate it altogether. We need the realistic education (rather than proclamation of great spiritual truth like we all are one, children of God or identical with Brahman) so that we learn to assert our identity, as individual or as a member of certain social or cultural group, within certain limit. We cannot push the assertion of our own identity to the extent of denying equal (as far as possible) right of others to their identity and self-expression. We cannot enjoy opportunities to the extent of pushing the other groups with other identities into an oppressed group. In a word the most realistic programme of achieving just global society is to establish or encourage assertion of one's identities without apology or vengeance. This amounts to practicing exclusiveness with tolerance. This is the message of pluralist India, if there is any, of open debate or dialogical or communicative rationality along with effective education to that effect is the viable and civilized means of achieving human solidarity. There had always been in the past and will always remain in future some antisocial and misguided people and corrupt industrialist and leaders. Add to this today's very strong but often corrupt media. A strong intelligentsia, uncorrupted media, a hopeful mass will bring if not an ideal society, at least a better livable society which will be tolerant to diversity and will practice exclusiveness with accommodation, will be sensitive to the right of the future generation and preservation of environment. Such slow and silent revolutionary democratic forces will bring about a strong human unity in this world which will ensure that some willing men will be free to practice as a matter of personal culture the truth of the spiritual unity of the world. The regimented Indian society has not only a place for

such people but a great respect for them. However, scientific or philosophical explanation is expected to go much beyond the commonsense views and ordinary experience, but it cannot go against them. Within this constraint realistic explanation works and it is offered accordingly.

# Third Academic Session

# Bringing Nations Closer : An Environmentalist Approach

Sourin Bhattacharya

The idea of a world government is rather old. It is almost as old as the idea of modernity itself. Strife and tension, conflicts and clashes, wars intermittent and internecine are nothing new. Pre-modern world had also experienced them quite frequently. Before the emergence of nation-states, categories were geographical entities or groups of people organized under one or more chieftains or groups with strong ethnic identities. National feelings or sentiments or any sense of national identity took time to emerge. Our categories of thought changed with the emergence of these new feelings and sentiments. No wonder we started thinking differently! It was perhaps from a sense of self-preservation that we at all bothered about closer ties and relations of understanding with others. 'Others' in the modern period were gradually being conceptualized in national terms as different from sub-national groups and ethnic formations. This was in its turn premised upon the emergence of a sense of national selfhood. We now think of bringing nations closer. This seminar itself is a mark of that kind of thinking. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, which is now hosting this seminar, has collaborated with the UNESCO while organising course of lectures that are intended to explore the idea of human understanding and unity. This course has been running for about a decade now. Personally I have been fortunate enough to be associated with this lecture series since its inception. I would like to take this opportunity presented to me and speak on an extension of that same

exploratory work. Today I propose to approach the issue from an environmental point of view.

In the course of my lectures I normally make attempts to raise negative questions about such well established, almost unchallengeable virtues like efficiency and competition. I argue that these concepts, though invested with a lot of positive qualities in different discourses, are basically robotic and harbouring hidden machismo. They do not make for amiable faces. They are stiff, tough and business-like, quite matter of fact. They are important, not kind, rather po-faced. I know I have to explain. We live in a world where our needs are many but the resources to meet those needs are not enough, whether real or perceived. This is in fact the basic supposition behind the conception of an economic man. Since the person in the shape of this economic man has to function in a situation of scarcity s/he is required to do things efficiently. To attain a given goal s/he needs to use minimum resources and/or with given resources s/he needs to attain the maximum. This is the basic idea of efficient performance. Each one of us is required to be so. Our economic man then lives in a hostile world. This makes him/her competitive and s/he needs to take an edge over everybody in everything. This is the picture of that tough world. If nations are primarily made of such tough persons and self-images of nations are built up and projected like that then there is perhaps no hope for bringing them closer. Such nations will forever go on fighting each other in order to win a larger share of the cake. This is typically the mercantilist mentality. The size of the cake was presumed to remain fixed. By this the global size was meant. However the scope and possibility of expanding the size itself was yet to take root in global consciousness. This was something like a mercantilist closure of the mind. The irony of the situation was this - when subsequently in a later generation it was realized

that, global expansion, in physical terms, was possible, a still larger share of the cake also appeared feasible at the same time.

The virtue of a competitive way of life was even more strongly argued. If you try to excel others, others will also try to excel you. This will ultimately result in everybody trying to excel everyone else. The competitive exploration of the resources, it was argued,will lead to a most efficient utilization of the same. Such a theoretical position needs to be premised upon institutional arrangements that are hardly realizable in social practice. Even apart from these ifs and buts there are reasons to feel dissatisfied about the kind of society visualized in such theoretical models. It ultimately looks like a society of non-human beings, where each individual is expected to behave like a typical cog in the wheel. The machine is well-oiled, run by a super being in an absolutely mechanical manner, where the cogs are only to play their pre-assigned role in a pre-destined way. That is precisely the robotic vision of the current model holding sway of the mainstream mind. The basic picture is that of a market arrangement where an invisible hand in the form of an imaginary auctioneer is announcing hypothetical prices for everything that has been brought in the exchange arena. Responses to the price stimuli are in the form of hypothetical offers of quantities. Some of these offers constitute a demand for and some supply of commodities, depending on whether the robot like responders intend to have more than what they initially have or choose to dispose of a part of their initial holding. In this stimulus-response auction game that set of prices, remaining unchanged, corresponds to a perfect match between demand and supply with respect to every commodity in transaction. This is the equilibrium in the set of prices. The prices are the result of a robotic functioning of the mechanism which nevertheless involves individual human beings. This is the dominant model holding enormous power over the

mind of men. This model mediated through the all powerful globally organized modern capital spreads over the entire horizon of modern nation-states. The spread effect is so strong that it hardly leaves any room for alternatives, especially in the era of current socialist failure.

The nations are constituted in the image of the individuals. They are also hurled to live in a world filled with hostilities. The only way they would like to come close to each other in this scenario would be based on their calculus of self-interest. The national identities would remain unchanged, and they would like to form themselves into some kind of close relations only if each of them would feel that such formations would serve their national interests better. This is roughly the theoretical basis of all regional formations of our modern world including the European Union. The more successful among these efforts is certainly the formation of this Union. There are many others that spread over the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. They have attained various degrees of success. The EU, however, as everybody knows, had to cross many hurdles to reach the present status where it can be shown as a paradigmatic case of regional cooperation. Even then it faces new challenges which are being presently debated.

True that with these more successful instances of cooperation the national identities are likely to melt down. Physical restrictions of movements and communications need to be slowly withdrawn and ultimately it may lead to greater interaction and in the end perhaps more intimate collaboration. This is the expectation. Even if it begins with self-oriented calculus of interests it may ultimately foster friendship. Up to now this is the basis on which the EU enthusiasts are moving. But detractors are numerous. Every now and then it needs to be reiterated that some national sacrifices must be made for this

supra-national formation. This theoretical basis is fragile. The weakness lies in the fact that, after all, appeal has to be made to the altruistic motives and that too at the national level. Our present level of ethical accomplishment would not easily go with that. Thus it appears that questions of self-interests may not be altogether avoided at the present state. But they may be based on or related to the interests at the supra-national level.

We may look for such a theoretical foundation in some of our approaches to the environmental problem. At present I can think of three things that may help to reach a philosophical basis for closer relations among nations. Self-interest at the national level is what is being currently pursued in general with varying degrees of success. North-South cooperation or South-South cooperation are some examples of these models of self- interest. In these examples the pursuit of self-interest is involved in a way that the nations feel that their interests would be better served being inside the group formations rather than being out of it. The kind of supra-national formation that is now being discussed demands a sense of identity wider than the mere national level. This can only be premised upon a sense of supra-national calculus, totally free from the constraints of nationality. The sense of nationality need not be discarded, it may be kept under a sort of temporary slumber. But a word of caution here. The sense of nationality that has been put aside may raise its ugly head anytime under sufficiently favourable socio-economic and cultural conditions. Transcendence of national level sentiments and emotions, however, remains a difficult question. A possible strategy may perhaps be worked out in terms of a context-relative ethics. Recourse to a supra-national formulation may be the answer as per the need of the day, rather than a transcendentally higher order category to replace national level formulations. Transcendental positions are likely to meet stiffer opposition and

that would be bad strategy. I know strategic considerations do not always yield ideal solutions. Let that be a practical move for the time being.

National level take-off points are rather fragile. They can go only up to a point, not beyond that. Our alternative proposal is to begin with a supranational point of departure. This is the idea of planetarity, where we tend to link ourselves to the planet itself, rather than this world of our own. Here a subtle distinction is involved between the planet and the world. 'Planet' is still a physical category, whereas the world has cultural connotations. The world as we see it is divided among nations and, therefore, cannot be posited as a whole. The planet in fact can still be so posited. Maybe in a distant future even this will not be possible.

Thinking on the lines of the planet scale has the merit that you can discover there an element of commonality. We all share our habitation on this planet. On an even larger scale this could perhaps be argued about our galaxy. But our galaxy, the Milky Way, does not have that imprint on our consciousness. So we would not normally think in terms of our galaxy but we could very well do that in terms of our planet. This planet with all its living and non-living beings is making a voyage in vastness, the space. We are on this space-ship Earth. And the fate of all mankind, hangs on the common thread of survival and well-being of this planet. This gives us a genuine planetary view, where we should take all, without pausing to choose. Our slogan could be 'everything must survive'. A real non-violent slogan. The planetarity in approach and the methodology of non-violence go hand in hand. This we cannot achieve without transcending national identities. Forming various kinds of military, politico-economic and administrative blocs comprising member nations would not lead to a non-violent way of living.

Once we agree upon this planetary view then we can follow two theoretical ideas launched by James Lovelock and Nicholas Georgescu Roegen. Lovelock in the 1960s (Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth) proposed his Gaia hypothesis, which looks upon the whole world planetary system as one interdependent single living super-organism. This conception is so inclusive that it takes into account all the systems that are functioning on this planet-ranging from the human system to the systems at the microbial levels, the systems of plants and algae, along with the ocean systems including the systems of air currents. The current concern about global warming is an alarm on the Gaia front where, perhaps, there are dangers of a possible breakdown somewhere in the chain. It is true that there are many critics of this kind taking an alarmist approach. Observe, for instance, the case of ozone holes. It is linked to the level of cfc generated through human actions on the surface of the earth. At least so it is argued. At the world level this perception led to international conferences and agreements. This by no means was anything like a simple diplomatic exercise. But it perhaps bore fruit as latest reports on the holes suggest that they are now somewhat repaired. We have now less of this noise. There may be other reasons for that. But this proves the point that nations for a while were brought closer and that it was arguably for the perceived danger of the ship we are all sailing in, in the ocean of space, running the risk of being wrecked.

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen in his *Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (1971) argued that economic thinking so far has revolved round the idea of locomotion under the influence of Newtonian mechanical systems. It has not accommodated the idea of qualitative change which calls for approaches based on the thermodynamic idea of entropy. Locomotion is simply movement signifying no qualitative change. This is merely

quantitative. Genuine change is qualitative, as is the case with ageing. Things become qualitatively degenerative. They are not as effective as before. Processes in nature as in society are subject to the entropy law. Georgescu- Roegen gives an elaborate account of the operation of this law in the economic and the social process. This may lead to a pessimistic view of life. But this makes us less triumphant in attitude and, therefore, perhaps more restrained. A worthwhile attitude for nations to emulate. May the nations come closer in this humility.

# Globalization and the Clash of Civilizations

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

In the past decade a phrase has found for itself an apparently permanent place in the vocabulary of scholars involved in the study of contemporary history or international relations. The phrase is 'the clash of civilizations' – representing a (standard) stereotype dominating our thinking about discord and harmony not only among nations but that larger entity we call civilizations.[1] That stereotype represents one of the many possible approaches to that issue. We will consider that later. To begin with one may note that although only a multi-disciplinary approach will be adequate in exploring such a complex issue, there are traditions determining the ways of thinking in different disciplines – studies in International Relations, or Political Science, or Cultural Anthropology, or Philosophy, and so forth. In this brief presentation, the approach may be broadly categorized as a Historical approach – which seems appropriate since the concept of 'human civilization' is obviously a product of history and an outcome of our reflections on history. At the same time, our interest in history more often than not arises from our concerns in the present times; that is why the study of history has often been defined as a dialogue between the past and the present. What does history tell us about the past experience in inter-civilizational or international harmony or discord and what are the concerns of the present times which have a bearing on that historical experience? I will try to address that question and I propose to do so without burdening this essay with numerous citations and references because my concern is not with the empirical

evidence which historians have accumulated, but the way we read that history.

## Globalization and International Harmony

I venture to suggest that one of the chief concerns *today* may be said to be the impact of 'globalization'. We may begin with an examination of the question whether globalization ensures human unity and diminishes discord. The common sense answer will be that globalization does promote international harmony. Undoubtedly globalization promotes *economic links* between countries, *movement of population* across international borders, and *exchange between cultures* through the electronic media. Since the 1970s in the West and 1991 in India economic liberalization, lowering of tariff walls, encouragement of Foreign Direct Investment, etc has linked distant countries in a manner unknown before. Population movement involves migration of labour, mobility of professional middle classes, acculturation through residence abroad, growth of a common consumption pattern tending towards a common material culture, etc. have also been significant factors. Further, it is often said that the world as a whole has entered into the era of a new 'information order'.[2] Exchange of knowledge and culture has grown in volume due to the new Information Technology, the World Wide Web, the television industry, etc. For all these reasons globalization in our times is looked upon as a great bridge-builder and therefore it is expected to reduce international discord.

But we need to be cautious about these generalizations. Lowering of tariff rates and import of capital is not necessarily a positive thing in terms of accord between differently perceived interests of nations; in particular there are conflicts between the advanced and the backward countries over those issues. Hence we repeatedly see the World Bank or the GATT pressuring

unwilling countries to toe the line. Likewise, population movement often gives rise to conflictual relationships; the examples of immigrants like the Turkish workers in Germany, the Latin Americans in the U.S.A. or the ghettos of Asians in west Europe come to mind. There is no doubt a globalized market but inequalities between countries and sections within create conflicts, actual or potential.[3] Again the Information Technology in use now may increase the spatial range and volume of traffic but that does not necessarily mean harmony between cultures; oftener than not it works towards homogenization of different cultures. Homogenization of the globe in terms of culture is not a desirable end. As Tagore said long ago, homogenization destroys the individuality of cultures, unlike harmonization which preserves it.

## Patterns in the Past

These are some of the reasons to be skeptical of the potentials of globalization. Now let us look at the past. The patterns of past experience in human civilization, I will argue, suggest that globalization, economic links, advanced technology of communication, and political unity or accord are neither a *necessary* nor a *sufficient condition* for promoting human unity or reducing discord. Our argument will be that the locus of harmony between civilizations is somewhere else.

In the historical past there are instances of collaboration and exchange between civilizations and across national boundaries: the spread of Buddhism from India to China, Japan and East Asian countries from the first century AD is an instance. It is worthwhile to recall how the spread of Buddhism was promoted by the Chinese Emperor Ming Ti (c. 65 AD), and Prince Shotuku of Japan, and the rulers of Korea (4th century AD), or the adventures of lone monks like Padmasambhava (c. 745 AD) in

Tibet. There was no political unity nor even attempts to develop inter-state political understanding. Nor was there substantial overseas trade between India and China or Japan or Korea which were the recipient countries of the Buddhist faith and learning. Thus unifying tendencies in the material sense of the term were altogether absent. That does not seem to be a *necessary condition* for exchange between civilizations.

On the other hand, consider the fact that despite political unity and the absence of international boundaries in the Roman Empire there was an intense conflict between Christianity and pre-Christian religious beliefs until the time of Emperor Constantine (280-337 AD). If unity is a necessary condition as is commonly regarded, as a major step towards civilization, the spread of Christianity, that necessary condition was present in the form of an imperial unity unprecedented in Europe. And yet for three hundred years there was a protracted conflict between Christianity and paganism and primitive animism. Thus, the cultural history of millennia in Asia and Europe suggests that exchange and collaboration between civilizations has taken place regardless of unity in the *material* sense, i.e, political or economic unity, and the latter is not a *sufficient condition* for bringing about cultural exchange leading to harmony between civilizations.

It may be argued that in, thus talking about necessary and sufficient conditions in ancient times we fail to take into account the most important feature of modern times, technological advancement. Now, do advanced technological means of communication necessarily promote unity between cultures? The Industrial Revolution produced in Europe advanced printing and transport technologies but that did not promote cultural exchange between the colonized East and the imperialist western countries; there emerged not a pattern of exchange but a hegemony of

Western civilization. Edward Said has recently reminded us of that hegemony in his study of "Orientalism".[5]

## Conflict of Identities, Clash of Civilizations

If indeed history suggests that harmony between civilizations or countries does not depend on material means, though those means might indeed have a secondary role, then we need to look at the intellectual and ideational domain. It has often been asked, 'what is the main hindrance to such exchange and consequent harmony?' Since Immanuel Kant's work *Perpetual Peace,* many answers to that question have been attempted in modern times. In our times the answer oftenest heard is in terms of the problem of identities and the nature of civilizations. Amartya Sen is a prominent proponent of this view. He points to the multiplicity of identities as a factor not only in the relations between nations and civilizations but also in the relationship between constituent parts of those large entities. Along with the national identities, there are also identities in terms of linguistic affiliation, religious community, cultural linkages, caste or ethnic links, etc. Hence *identities perception* has a major role to play in not only the relationship between countries or civilizations , but also between linguistic or cultural or religious or ethnic groups within a country. Thus Amartya Sen draws our attention to the disharmony that arises from differing identity perceptions.[6] The issue is complex because of (a) the *plurality* of identities, (b) the *shifting hierarchy* of identities, and (c) the *contestation* the identities are subject to. Thus you may have a national identity, along with identity as Hindu or Muslim or Christian, identity as Bengali, identity as a member of a caste, etc. The context determines which of these identities are at the top of the hierarchy. In India today the religious and caste identities are important. This clashes with unity on the basis of national identity.

These various problems in the way of attaining harmony between human beings (divided as nations, states, cultural communities, ethnic groups, etc.) have been addressed by many thinkers in the past in many civilizations. Indian civilization, according to Indian Nationalist thinkers, had an answer to these problems. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the unity inherent in the inner truth of all religions. Rabindranath Tagore suggested that the principal trend in Indian civilization has been to bring unity within the diversities of this sub-continent. An historian Radha Kumud Mookerji, a nationalist Muslim Abul Kalam Azad, a liberal nationalist open to European ideas Jawaharlal Nehru, and many others wrote on these lines. This was their answer to the problems outlined above.[7] In fact, if we read their message of *syncretism and the compositeness* of culture in India as the *recognition of the plurality of identities,* we may see an anticipation of the point made by Amartya Sen.

Since these ideas have been for decades a part of the nationalist world outlook we are thoroughly familiar with, it is unnecessary to elaborate on it. It is more useful to note how it has been contested. While this ideal of a composite culture and syncretism has been vitally necessary in the process of nation building, the same approach can be extended to the domain of international and inter-civilizational relations. As opposed to such an approach we have the very influential paradigm offered by Samuel Huntington who believes that characteristics of some civilizations make clash between civilizations and countries inevitable.[8] Huntington divides the world into eight "major civilizations". These are Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox (Christian), Western, Latin American and African. This classification is peculiar in that the *differentia specifica*, separating one unit from another, are not self-consistently employed. Of these so-called civilizations in Huntington's

scheme two are geographically defined (Africa, Latin America), three are defined in cultural terms (Sinic, Japanese, Western civilizations), and three are defined solely in terms of the dominant religion (Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox Christian).

Not only does this classificatory scheme defy all logic of classification,these are serious conceptual problems. When we come to the core of his thesis, clashes between civilizations, his historical narrative is also open to question. Huntington attempts a historical narrative of the past conflicts between Islamic and Christian civilizations. He projects a continuity from the Crusades of the middle ages to the present day conflicts (often triggered off by Islamic fundamentalism and consequent spread of terrorism) between the Western Powers and the countries in West Asia. There are problems with his narrative for it involves a silent elision from 'Christianity' to 'the West' as the adversary of Islam. His narrative of continuity from Crusades to say the Iraq War ignores the fact that the adversaries are not the same, and the *casus belli* are also vastly different. Despite serious shortcomings in Huntington's thesis it has gained global currency and wide acceptance in the West, perhaps because it represents aggression and conflict as an inevitability of history and thus indirectly justifies the international policies of the Western Powers led by the USA.

At this point, it is useful to ask whether there are historical instances of trends contrary to the generally accepted Huntington paradigm. In order to instantiate the evolution of a notion of harmony between civilizations I would like to look at the idea of unity that developed in the inter-relationship between civilizations of Asia. We usually take the idea of Asia for granted. I propose to take a look at the growth of the "idea of Asia" in modern times to try and understand what went into the making of that idea, an apposite instance of inter-civilizational harmony in the long view of history.

## The Idea of Asia and Harmony between Asian Civilizations

I will begin by saying that to my mind it is a paradox that the trans-national idea of 'Asia' arises from the discourse of nationalism in modern times. It was the nationalist ideologues who posited in the late 19th and in the 20th century the notion of Asia as a larger civilizational category as distinct from the political entity the nationalists made it their business to create or shape. The paradox lies in the apparent contradiction between the intellectual stance in respect of the inclusive discourse of civilization on one hand, and on the other the exclusionary principle inherent in the discourse of nationality and citizenship. When one talked about nationhood, the discourse did not admit of any porosity and for any one to adhere to another entity such as the transnational entity 'Asia' was inconsistent with the basic political and legal premises of nationhood. And yet some of the best minds of India, China, Japan, Indonesia and many other countries nurtured and developed in the late 19th and the in the twentieth century the notion of an Asian identity exceeding the limits of nationality. This was the identity that stemmed from the idea of Asia, positing a unity broader than what nationhood posited, an identity common to the people of different nations Asia.

The idea of Asianism first appears in its intellectual form in the writings of Okakura in Japan and Tagore in India. Tagore's visits to China and Okakura's to India were two seminal events.[9] The idea was later elaborated by their followers like Tan Yun Shan.[10] Asianism becomes a political agenda within the nationalist ideology. Perhaps a major event was that in the first few years of the twentieth century Japan defeated Russia and also ended unequal treaties with European Powers. These were the treaties which legalized European hegemony over some

Asian countries like China while other Asian countries like India were simply politically subjugated. The assertion of Japanese sovereignty against the might of European Powers aroused tremendous enthusiasm among nationalists in the colonised or semi-colonised Asians. We have plenty of evidence of that in India. In 1924 this sentiment became a political agenda when Sun Yat-Sen in a famous essay read in Kobe, entitled 'Great Asianism" proposed a new picture of the future. He said China, Japan, India, Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkey etc. despite cultural heterogeneity had a place in a concept of Asia which was integral to the formation of nation states. The Japanese had their own and quite a different version of Asianism, centred around the notion of east Asia being a 'co-prosperity sphere' which some critics interpreted as a cover for Japanese colonialism.[11] In the 1930s Indian intellectuals like Tagore took up the cry of Asianism.

The Indian National Congress annually passed resolutions on these lines and on the eve of Indian Independence in April 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru organized an Asian Relations Conference in Delhi. The Conference had 250 delegates from 22 Asian countries. In the meanwhile a series of annual conferences began to be organized by Socialist parties in India, Burma or Myanmar, Indonesia, etc. known as the Asian Socialist Conference. It is well known that in 1953 the Bandung Conference brought together Nehru, U Nu of Burma, Sukarno of Indonesia, Chou en Lai of China, Abdul Nasser of Egypt, Muhammad Ali of Pakistan, and other leaders of the new post-decolonization Asian countries along with observers from Africa. It was the climax of the nationalist struggle in many Asian countries to give a political content to the idea of Asia.[12]

Why did some of the most prominent nationalists in Asian societies in modern times, nurse and empower such a transnational notion? We have to remind ourselves of the history

that preceded the construction of the idea of Asia by the nationalist intelligentsia. The pre-colonial history of the continent was characterized by the spread of cultures and civilizations cutting across political boundaries or ethnic identity consciousness. This flow of culture and ideas is a major theme of Asia's pre-modern or pre-colonial history. One salient part of that story was the spread of Buddhism in China and East Asia which I mentioned earlier. There were instances of kings and emperors welcoming missionaries of other cultures regardless of political barriers. Again, one may recall the vast population movements from central Asia to the west and south of Asia, and similarly from south Asia to eastern Asia. For example, recall the civilizational confluence that occurred with the migration and expansion of ethnic groups of inner Asia to the declining Caliphate's eastern dependencies in Khorasan, their incursion into Iranian plateau, the Ghaznavid's adaptation to Iranian culture, the Ghaznavid movement to the south being pushed from behind by the Seljuks, and the rise of the Ghors in central Afghanistan, leading to their capture of Ghazni and incursion into India.

A good part of the nobility and bureaucracy which ruled in the Sultanate period in India, needless to say, came out of this vast churning and population movements. Indian medievalists tell us how much Sultan Iltutmish (1210-36 AD) depended for military and administrative service on Turkish slaves and Persian-speaking Taziks and for a long time Turkoman and Irani-Turani immigrants continued find placement in the same services in the Sultanate: needless to say, by slow degrees the trans-border immigrants were outnumbered by the indigenous people of Hindu or Muslim communities in the imperial scheme of things in the later Sultanate and the Mughal period. It was a very cosmopolitan ruling class that you find in early medieval India. Or

again I ask you to recall the contacts between India and south east Asia through trade, migration and cultural channels – sometime dubiously described as India's colonial expansion. Or you consider the trade route through the Silk Road cutting across western and central Asia which was a live channel for centuries while kings and conquerors came and departed like Ozymandias, immortalized by the English poet Shelley.

The point of bringing up those instances of confluence between civilizations and population groups of different parts of Asia in pre-modern times is to help us situate European colonial intervention in its context. The territorial states and international borders colonial powers created impeded these flows across boundaries. In the colonial period, different congeries of population groups were arbitrarily bundled into the states which British, French, Dutch or Portuguese colonialism gave birth to. As they were bundled into territorial units which colonialism created, some Asian people were separated from part of their own kind; and what was more important, territoriality as defined by the colonial masters also impeded the flow that united different peoples and cultures in pre-colonial times. When the Asian native intelligentsia started talking about the harmony of the cultures and civilizations of Asia in the late 19th and early 20th century, they made a departure from the colonial discourse of the European Powers.

To sum it up, Asian people had behind them a tradition of confluence of people and cultures (along with, no doubt, conflictual relationships as well). Therefore we may argue that the development of the idea of Asia, an ideal instance of harmony between civilizations, in the late 19th and the 20th century was not a new discovery. It was a *recovery* of what had been lost under colonial rule. The modern intelligentsia in these colonised countries did not need to learn about Asia from the text books

their European rulers had brought in, and only in a minor way they owed their consciousness about Asia to the means of transport and communication which colonial rule initiated. They had only to recover the tradition of inter-cultural give and take that had happened for the greater part of Asian history in ancient and mediaeval times. On the part of the new intelligentsia it was an act of recognition, one might say '*re-cognition*', of an entity called Asia far exceeding the boundaries on the political maps.

Further, it may be argued that what empowers the idea of Asia in modern times is not the power of the rhetoric of the intelligentsia in the past or in our times. What empowers the idea of Asia is the *memory in the unwritten archives of each culture*, the memory of the pre-colonial and pre-modern times when there was a free flow of people and cultures across the continent. This, I venture to suggest, is a major reason why the pre-modern in the history of Asia has a contemporary significance.

Having seen that the civilizational discourse accommodating the presence of the idea of Asia was moulded by the historical experience of many centuries, we may now turn to the question why the idea of Asia is reborn in modern times.[13] The re-assertion of the Asian idea was a part of this intellectual reaction of the subjected people (hegemonised as in China, if not politically subjugated, as in India). It was a part of an intellectual movement highlighting the fact that not withstanding the abasement of Asian countries under colonialism, they were inheritors of a great of civilizational tradition. The discourse of civilization became a vital site of contestation against European hegemony, particularly intellectual hegemony, it was also the site for the assertion of Asianism, i.e. the idea of harmony between Asian civilizations. In this contestation, no doubt, a good deal of nationalist chauvinism and disregard to rigorous historical methodology were seen. But

the accuracy of what was said is not under discussion now, why was it said is the point. Moreover, it must be admitted that the 'idea of Asia' was also sometimes used to build one Asian country's domination over others, what is called in the media the 'big brother' stance in international relations. For a while the Japanese 'co-prosperity sphere', also based on an appeal to the Asian idea, played that role and it has been criticised as a camouflage for a new colonialism. Thus the 'idea of Asia' carried different messages in different contexts. Be that as it may, the central characteristic of the discourse of Asianism was to highlight the harmony between Asian civilizations.

## Summing Up

In conclusion, let me sum up my argument: There is an impression abroad that globalization in our times will reduce discord between nations and bring about international harmony. That expectation arises out of the tendency in globalization towards promotion of economic links between countries, international migration of population, and cultural exchange by means of modern information technology and media of communication. There are reasons to be skeptical of such a potential in globalization. Having stated those reasons, we argued that the existence of material means of that kind is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for ensuring harmony or dispelling discord between nations and civilizations. We examined some historical instances which suggest that conclusion. That leads us to seek the locus of 'harmony' elsewhere. In the recent writings on the subject two approaches merit our attention. One approach emphasizes the plurality of identities, shifting hierarchy of identities, and the contestation which identities are subject to. This approach in Amartya Sen's writings has much to recommend it. To some extent the Indian nationalist discourse, —

preeminently the writings of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, et al. – anticipated this approach if we read into their notion of syncretism and the composite nature of Indian culture the recognition of the plurality of identities. The second approach, currently finding wide acceptance in the West, represents the history of international relations as the clash of civilizations. Essentially this paradigm in Samuel P. Huntington's writings, posits the inevitability of conflict, given the attributes of certain civilizations which are locked in a long history of conflict on account of the nature of their civilization. For example, there is such a continuity in the conflict between west Asian Islam and European Christianity from the mediaeval Crusades to conflicts between west Asian countries and Western Powers in our times. We have seen that there are several infirmities in that narrative in Huntington's account as well as conceptual problems in his theorization; his paradigm has acquired influential status perhaps because it offers an intellectual defence of the Western Powers' policies in west Asia from Iraq wars onwards.

In the last section of this lecture, we raise the question, are there historical instances contrary to Huntington's paradigm? We examine the notion and the intellectual movement of 'Asianism' or simply the 'idea of Asia' which recalls to our mind the nationalist thinkers and leaders like Sun Yat-sen in China, U Nu in Burma, Nehru in India, Soekarno in Indonesia, Nasser in Egypt and others. The idea at the core of their outlook was that of harmony between the civilizations in Asia, an idea rooted in the ancient history of cultural co-evolution and mutual influence, as well as the modern intelligentsia's sense of Asian unity in the face of Western imperialism. We conclude that the presently dominant paradigm of the historical inevitability of the 'clash of civilizations' is open to question and the history of civilization in India and other Asian countries provide intellectual resources to

seek possibilities of finding the locus of harmony in our own history and tradition.

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# Fourth Academic Session

# The Evolution of the Process of International Understanding for Human Unity

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ABSTRACT

The paper will briefly describe the evolution in the international understanding of human unity and peace. It will start with the concept in the pre-Christian era promoted by several religions, followed by the early modern concept of perpetual peace and the process of achieving it in the "The Social Contract" of Rousseau (1762), "Plan for an universal and Perpetual Peace" of Jeremy Bentham (1786-89), Immanuel Kant's peaceful community of nations (1795), the constitution of the Concert of Europe (1814), the formation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (1889) to resolve conflicts, establishment of the Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Movement (1897) to promote universalism and human unity. It will then discuss the creation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (1899) for international dispute resolution and the Hague Conventions (1899 & 1907). The roadmap then sketches the modern means of achieving international understanding through the League of Nations (1919-1946), whose "sole purpose was to maintain world peace and which would sort out international disputes as and when they occurred", establishment of the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (1925) to promote intercultural dialogue. The reasons for the failure of the League and its replacement by the United Nations in 1945 will be analysed and the latter's role in promoting an international understanding through its powerful Security

Council and specialized agencies especially the UNESCO, the University for Peace set up in 1980 in Costa Rica and its affiliates around the world to promote cooperation among peoples; the UNESCO supported program at the R K Mission Institute of Culture on International Understanding and Human Unity (2005) will also be discussed. The paper will conclude with lessons derived from the past and delineate the way forward discussing the relevance of the ideas and ideals of Swami Vivekananda on universalism based on "Practical Vedanta" in promoting international understanding. The paper will end by giving some educational strategies to implement Vivekananda's ideas.

## Introduction

The concept of human unity and the role of religion in pre-Christian era.

Several religions prophesied that their messages would promote human unity. In India, the Upanishads during the period 800-600 BCE asserted that all human beings are one and the same. Their differences are only external. Unity is embedded among human beings. That has only to be nurtured. The Upanishadic thinkers arrived at that "ultimate reality" going back and forth following a "cosmo-theo-psychological" approach progressively building on each other's ideas and refuting improbable approaches.[3] During the same period, sometime in the eighth century BC, Isaiah, amid a series of battles prophesied international understanding with the saying: "The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes". [4]

Although Isaiah is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an or in the authenticated sayings of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim sources have accepted him as a prophet, according to the "Encyclopedia of Islam".

Similarly, Buddhism propagated in India in the fifth century BC and later practiced in many Asian countries, placed great

importance on the human bonds that form the context in which the teachings (the Law or dharma) are practiced and transmitted. In the Christian era, the second commandment gives the universal message for human unity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

## 2. The Concept of International Understanding for Human Unity in Early Modern Period: The Role of Philosophy

War devastated Europe gave rise to a number of concepts to promote unity among the different European countries. One could mention the proposal of a confederation of all Christian nations by the French Statesman Maximillien de Béthune (1560-1641) and the plan of William Penn for a "diet of states" to be achieved mainly by means of commercial policies[5].

The forerunner in the attempts to create a more concrete concept was Abbé Charles-Irénne Castel de Saint Pierre (1658-1743). In his book "A Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe" published in 1714 he used the philosophical methodology of Descartes to promote understanding of unity in conflict-ridden Europe by the idea of building a unified federation. While originally he included all the nations of the world, later, he restricted it to the confederation of Europe as it was more realistic and proposed twelve fundamental articles. Most important of them for our purpose were for Christian Sovereigns of Europe to make treaties with Muslim sovereigns; conflicts to be discussed and mediated by the senate where all sovereigns are represented by deputies, prohibition of use of arms except against a declared enemy and no nation could keep more than 6000 soldiers. The project however did include the provision of waging a war against a nation refusing to join the Union after fourteen nations joined it. In that sense human force prevailed to achieve human unity over "understanding".

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) appears next with the criticism of Saint-Pierre's "project", because, according to him, it was too rational for people to appreciate. Moreover, driven by ambition, greed and power, the princes were too shortsighted to be able to see the the wisdom of general good. In his book "The Social Contract" (1762) he asserts: "society itself is an implicit agreement to live together for the good of everyone with individual equality and freedom" and criticizes that governments were obstacles. He promoted laws to protect the weak and punish the powerful errants. He specified rules for legislators so that the laws are in harmony with reason and the general good. To avoid the violence and hatred of war and the division among human beings within and between nations, Rousseau argued that a federal form of government must be devised to unite nations, as nations unite individuals, under the authority of law. He delineated four necessary conditions for the success of a federation: every important power is a member; laws are binding; every state is to obey the common resolve if necessary with use of coercive force and prohibition of withdrawal of any member. His plan proposed five articles: permanent alliance with a congress for conflicts to be settled and terminated by arbitration or judicial pronouncement; determination of voting power, transfer of presidency and contribution quotas for common expenses; permanence of existing boundaries; banning of violators and forced compliance by use of arms from all confederates and finally change of articles needing a majority vote at the start, three-quarters vote after five years and unanimity thereafter. Rousseau argued that sovereigns should not fear the federation because it is only asking them to be just in the prevailing context of injustice because of might, insecurity of nations, military expenses, no guarantee for international agreements, no safe or inexpensive means of obtaining justice when wronged, loss of

trade during war and crises and general impoverishment and lack of security. The benefits he argued were: certainty of settling disputes peacefully, abolition of the causes of disputes, personal security for rulers, fulfillment of agreements between rulers, freedom of trade, reduced military expenses increase in public wealth and happiness. Rousseau, finally concluded that the only way a federation could be established would be by means of a revolution; but sensing the violence in that, he considered it as much to be feared as to be desired.[6]

Next in the series of philosophical thinkers on international understanding for human unity arrives Jeremy Bentham ((1748-1832). Bentham in his work "A Plan for Universal and Perpetual Peace " (written in 1789 but published after his death in 1833) had two main propositions: to reduce military forces in Europe and to emancipate colonies. He asked for the welfare of all civilized nations with three goals: "simplicity of government, national frugality and peace". He proposed to establish a common court of judiciary to resolve differences. Contrary to Saint-Pierre and Rousseau, Bentham was a pacifist, promoted power of public opinion and suggested that the "court" not be armed with coercive powers and the Congress of deputies selected from each country should be public in its proceedings. However, his excessive reliance on public opinion for decision in respect to resolving disputes was questioned in absence of an enlightened public. Although his plan was idealistic, sketchy and did not present the executive and legislative powers for a federal system, it did show the usefulness of disarmament and the dangers of colonialism and secrecy as well as the principles of an international judiciary and open public opinion in international affairs.

In proposing philosophical concepts of international understanding for human unity, Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804),

considered to be the greatest philosopher in the age of enlightenment, discussed in his book 'The Science of Right', the right of nations and international law and the universal right of mankind. He pointed out that "nations like individuals, must enter into a legal state, in this case, a union of states which is the only way to establish peace and the public right of nations. Thus a permanent Congress of nations must eventually become practical so that differences may be settled by means of a civil process instead of by barbarous war."[7] Judicial principle of legal justice should be the basis for the union of all nations. For him a league of nations is an inevitable result of social evolution. He emphasized the role of education in achieving this. He also foresaw that the cost of war and the value of interstate commerce would facilitate the formation of an international government. He went further to establish six conditions for human unity through his major work entitled: "Perpetual Peace" (1795). These are: in a treaty of peace no tacitly reserved matter for a future war; no independent states shall come under the dominion of another; standing army shall in time be totally abolished; national debts shall not be contracted for external friction of states; no state shall interfere with the constitution of another state and finally no state shall, during war, permit such acts of hostility which would make mutual confidence in the subsequent peace impossible.

Kant observed that the state of nature tends towards conflict and war destroying human unity while ignoring international understanding for human unity. So peace must be actively established and maintained as a civil state. He gave three definitive articles for civil constitutions at three levels: the law of persons, the law of nations and the law of world citizenship. The first definitive article states, "The civil constitution of every state should be republican"; the laws of persons must be applied universally. The second definitive article states: "The law of

nations shall be founded on a federation of free states". In the federation, a supreme legislative, executive and judicial power may be established to achieve human unity. The third definitive article states: "The law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality "He considered a law of world citizenship indispensable for human rights and perpetual peace. He understood that even if differences of language and religion keep states separate, competition will maintain equilibrium. Commerce makes peace preferable to war. Like Bentham, Kant also recognized the power of public opinion.

The concept of a peaceful community of nations proposed by Kant outlined the idea of a league of nations to promote international understanding for human unity and peace between nations. Kant argued for the establishment of a peaceful world community where each state would declare itself a free state that respects its citizens and welcomes foreign visitors as fellow rational beings, thus promoting peaceful society worldwide.[8]

## 3. Modern Concepts of Human Unity: Organizational and Institutional Practices

Early modern concepts of human unity were followed by organizational and institutional arrangements to achieve human unity through international understanding. First among them was the organization of the Congress of Vienna[9] held between September 1814 to June 1815 by the victorious countries Austria, Russia, Prussia and Great Britain, just after Napoleon was defeated in the war. Defeated France joined a little later and played an important role in setting its goal of arriving at a balance of power among the countries and peace among nations.

The agreements set were upheld by the creation in the same year of an alliance known as Concert of Europe or the Congress System where leaders would meet to reach decisions by mutual

understanding to keep Europe united. This institutional arrangement succeeded in keeping unity among nations in Europe for the next forty years but the Concert continued to exist until 1914. It failed because of years of disagreement between the countries especially between Great Britain and other conservative countries of the Concert resulting in the First World War.[10]

Meanwhile in 1889 two peace activists William Randal Cremer of United Kingdom and Frederic Passy of France established the first organization which was international in scope called the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU). Initially with individual parliamentarians the IPU has later been transformed into an international organization of the parliaments of sovereign states with 162 members today[11].

It was the first permanent forum for political multinational negotiations with an aim to encourage governments to settle international disputes by peaceful means. The adoption of the Convention for Pacific settlement of International Disputes created the Permanent Court of Arbitration[12]. The IPU played an important part in setting up this Court as well. This would have its function to enforce the international laws which were originated in the Concert of Europe and developed first with the Geneva Conventions (1864) on humanitarian issues and then by Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907[13] on peaceful settlement of international disputes. Annual conferences of the IPU would refine the process of international arbitration.

The two conventions established a model for multilateral meetings to hash out international law influencing the formation of the League of Nations. We shall come back to the League later.

Meanwhile an interesting event happened. In 1891 observing interreligious misunderstandings as root of many conflicts, a

group of sixteen persons from different religious backgrounds was given the responsibility of organizing the World Parliament of Religion with the following objectives.[14]

1. To bring together in one conference for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great historic religions of the world.

2. To show to men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions hold and teach in common.

3. To promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity.

4. To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom.

5. To indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism, and the reasons for man's faith in Immortality, and thus to unite and strengthen the forces which are adverse to a materialistic philosophy of the universe.

6. To secure from leading scholars, representing the Brahman, Buddhist, Confucian, Parsee, Mohammedan, Jewish and other Faiths, and from representatives of the various churches of Christendom, full and accurate statements of the spiritual and other effects of the Religions which they have upon the Literature, Art, Commerce, Government, Domestic and Social life of the peoples among whom these Faiths have prevailed.

7. To inquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other religions of the world.

8. To set forth, for permanent record to be published to the world, an accurate and authoritative account of the present

condition and outlook of Religion among the leading nations of the earth.

9. To discover from competent men, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially the important questions connected with Temperance, Labour, Education, Wealth and Poverty.

10. To bring the nations of the Earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.

The emphasis was placed more on searching for religious commonalities and building of "human brotherhood". Indeed, the invitation sent to the world's religious leaders was an appeal to help in presenting to the world, the religious harmony and unity of humanity, and also to show that the moral and spiritual agencies are at the root of human progress.

Attended by more than four thousand people in the opening session in the Hall of Columbus on the shore of Lake Michigan, Chicago, on 11 September 1893, where representatives of ten important religions of the world walked hand in hand with the Liberty bell tolled ten times in their honour. This was the most important effort until then to promote international understanding for human unity. The attendance increased to more than seven thousand in the closing session on the seventeenth day.

The event was historic for India. Although we know about the long applause Swami Vivekananda received for addressing the audience as "Sisters and brothers of America" the advocacy of Vedantic Hinduism by Swami Vivekananda with the proclamation that "every religion is only an evolving God out of a material man; and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Contradictions among religions were only apparent and came from the same truth adapting itself to different circumstances of different natures". His proposal of a "universal religion" with its

characteristics captivated the attention of the American audience. His setting up of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1897 where universality of religion is supposed not only to be believed in theory but also practised in reality had the following objectives.

a) To impart and promote the study of Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of Comparative Theology in its widest form.

b) (i) To impart, promote and undertake the study and research in the arts, sciences, technologies and industries in all their branches both basic and applied. (ii) To undertake scientific research in the area of medical sciences.

c) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above mentioned and enable them to reach the masses.

d) To carry on educational work among the masses.

e) To establish, maintain, carry on, and assist schools, colleges, universities, research institutions, libraries, auditoriums, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the aged, the infirm, the invalid and the afflicted, relief and rehabilitation work, and any other educational, medical, cultural and social welfare services and training institutions and charitable work and institutions of a like nature.

f) To print and publish and to sell or distribute gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books, or leaflets that the association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.

g) To carry on any other work which may seem to the association capable of being conveniently carried on in connection with and calculated directly or indirectly to promote the above-mentioned objects.[15]

One could observe the combination of both spiritual and secular activities in its programs.

Vivekananda stood apart from all reformers of that era, by emphasizing that all human beings are potentially divine. Serving the poor, the masses, and the underprivileged one would serve God, he asserted[16].

As of 2010 there were 172 centres including 42 in 19 countries outside India. There are 1506 educational institutions of various types with more than 400,000 students benefiting as much as possible from the type of education Swamiji envisaged. We shall discuss this further later.

We continue with the institutional arrangements for human unity.

With the philosophical background of Emmanuel Kant described earlier and the organizational and institutional support and influence from the two Hague conventions and the Inter Parliamentary Union the League of Nations was formed in 1919 as a result of the Paris Peace Conference ending the First World War. It was the first international organization with the principal mission of maintaining world peace, preventing wars through collective security and disarmament. One of its primary goals was to settle international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. On 21 September 1921 the League of Nations adopted a resolution to elect a Commission to study the question of creating the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation on 4 January 1922 as a consultative organ composed of individuals elected on the basis of their personal qualifications. The International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation was then created as the executive agency for the Committee to promote international understanding at the intellectual level. Two other International non-governmental organizations were created in 1925 to promote international understanding. The International Bureau of Education was created in Geneva in the service of educational development. The Cité Internationale Universitaire

de Paris (International University City of Paris) was created to house students and academic scholars of countries around the world to promote inter cultural dialogue through "living together". With the onset of the Second World War the League of Nations became dysfunctional. It failed in its mission of promoting international cooperation and maintaining peace for the following reasons.[17]

The imperialist character of the peace achieved at the Paris Peace Conference handicapped the League. It never represented the world balance of forces. USA never became a member. Soviet Union joined only in 1934. It was dominated by Anglo French powers to maintain imperialist domination.

The League was founded on the principle of unanimity except those who were party to dispute. Every single member, even the smallest and least powerful country not having the responsibility of maintaining world peace could wreck it. The big powers often used them to have their way.

### 4. Post Second World War Attempts to Promote International Understanding for Human Unity

The League ultimately failed to prevent the aggression of Axis Powers. Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain and some others withdrew from it in the 1930s and the Second World War started in 1939. The United Nations (UN) replaced it after the end of the war in 1945. The details are given below.

4.1 The United Nations[18]

The United Nations had the stated aims of facilitating international understanding for human unity through its various programs especially to achieve world peace. Its most powerful organ is the Security Council (UNSC), consisting of five permanent members with veto powers and ten elected members, responsible for the maintenance of international peace and

security with binding resolutions on peace keeping, peace enforcement missions and non-military pressure mediums. Its non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly, the main deliberative assembly, consisting of all members admitted by itself on proposals of the Security Council. Its Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General assisted by a staff of international civil servants worldwide. The Secretary General's duties include helping resolve international disputes. He brings to the attention of the Security Council any matter that may threaten international peace and security. He acts as a mediator addressing disputes between member states and finding consensus. Its judicial organ, the International Court of Justice was also established in 1945, by the UN Charter with the purpose to adjudicate disputes among states.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, as a common standard of achievement for all. Although not legally binding it has succeeded in bringing out human unity to a large extent.

Let us mention some of the weaknesses of the UN. Large number of studies have been undertaken to find them and sometimes to correct them. These are of the following types.

Philosophical and moral allegations of globalism, debates surrounding population control and abortion, role of elite nations, veto power, lack of effectiveness, diplomatic and political criticisms, inability to prevent war and even democratic nature of the organization.

The founders of the UN envisaged that the UN would act to prevent conflict between nations and make future wars impossible. However the outbreak of the Cold War made peacekeeping agreements extremely difficult because of the division of the world into two hostile camps.

Disagreements in the Security Council about military action and intervention are seen as having failed to prevent several conflicts.

Due to its restrictive administrative structure, the permanent members of the Security Council themselves have sometimes prevented the UN from fully carrying out its mandates of conflict resolution.

There are accusations that the UNSC only addresses the strategic interests and political motives of the permanent members.

UN's intergovernmental nature (not an independent organization) has allowed some member states to show reluctance to achieve UNSC's peacekeeping resolution.

However, avoidance of some of the pitfalls of the League of Nations and involvement of all the member states in General Assembly with a voice and presence of ten elected members and openness to criticism and attempts to reform may have a role in having it continue its function.

Moreover, it was the UN Secretary General U. Thant who succeeded in achieving understanding between Soviet Union and USA to avoid the nuclear war in 1963. A 2005 Rand Corporation study found the UN to be successful in two out of three peacekeeping efforts. The 2005 Human Security Report documented a decline in the number of wars since the end of the Cold War Europe is much more united today than it had ever been thanks partly to the UN. So it survives.

A large number of UN agencies have been set up to work on particular issues on human welfare bringing large number of countries together. Out of a total number of 17 such organizations the most important for our subject is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the UNESCO was established in 1946, one year after the UN. We shall discuss this below.

## 4.2. The Role of UNESCO in Promoting International Understanding for Human Unity.[19]

As mentioned in Section 3 the seed of UNESCO was sown in the League of Nations with the creation of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in 1925 to promote human unity through development of education and intellectual cooperation. They became largely inactive at the onset of the war. UNESCO was set up with the aim in its constitution "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without discrimination of race, sex, language or religion, or by the Charter of United Nations information". In respect of education UNESCO follows Article 26 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

"Education shall be directed toward the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace." The promotion of peace through education is at the heart of UNESCO's mission.

Though the world has changed over the past sixty five years and continues to change at an ever increasing rate, UNESCO's mission - a commitment to promoting universal values of peace and nonviolence, human rights and social justice, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding – persists with growing urgency. UNESCO's approach to educating for peace is multidimensional, in that it links education with a range of activities that address the root causes of violence, from human

security to sustainable development. The goal of UNESCO's education programs and partnerships is the development of comprehensive systems of education that embrace the values of human rights, intercultural understanding and tolerance. Education for peace and non-violence promotes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire these values."[20]

The constitution of UNESCO rests upon the basic premise: "That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world and that the peace must, therefore, be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind". Its constitution further claims that:

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed". The role of education becomes essential in the construction of that defence. It is with that mission in view UNESCO's activities in the education and related sectors have included the following.

• Research in Comparative Education.

• Provision of expertise and fostering partnerships to strengthen national educational leadership and the capacity of countries to offer quality education for all through its ten specialized institutes working on different topics of the sector. These are: International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in Paris(headquarters) and Buenos Aires (regional office),UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE) in Moscow, International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) in Addis Ababa, UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and

the Caribbean (IESALC) in Caracas, UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Bonn, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES) in Bucharest, UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education (UNESCO-IHE) in Delft, International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in Montreal.[21]

• Convention against Discrimination in Education adopted in 1960.

• Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice in 1978.

• Organization of the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) in an interval of 12 years.

• Publication of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report.

• Issuing 'statements' to educate the public.

• Observing International Literacy Day (8 September), International Day of Democracy (15 September), International Day of Peace (21 September) and World Teachers' Day (5 October) , World Science Day for Peace and Development (10 November), International Day for Tolerance (16 November), and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November).

• Promotion of universal access to ICTs, through the Information for All Program (IFAP).

• Observing International Year for the Culture of Peace.

• Promoting pluralism and cultural diversity in the media.

• Performing such events as International Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World: 2001–2010, proclaimed by the UN in 1998.

UNESCO is promoting international understanding for human unity through its 195 Member States and eight Associate Members (Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands,

Curaçao, Faroes, Macao (China), Sint Maarten, Tokelau).

The activities with Member States includes the following.[22]

### 4.2 (a) Mainstreaming Culture of Peace Values into National Education Systems

UNESCO advances peace education activities by providing support to Member States to integrate a holistic vision of quality education that promotes the values of a culture of peace at all levels of their education systems.

(The UNESCO office in New Delhi has piloted a project with the National Council for Teacher Education to field test an Education for Peace manual in India).

### 4.2 (b) Monitoring International Normative Instruments

The 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education occupies the foremost place among UNESCO's standard-setting instruments in the field of education.

The 1974, UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is an elaboration of Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Recommendation sets out guiding principles for UNESCO's action to promote education on peace and respect for human rights.

The 1995 Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy is UNESCO's major instrument for action in the field of Education for Human Rights and Citizenship.

### 4.2 (c) Networking, Advocacy and Research

#### 4.2 (c) (i) UNESCO National Commissions

UNESCO is the only UN Agency to have a global network of national cooperating bodies known as National Commissions for

UNESCO. Set up by their respective governments in accordance with the Article VII of the UNESCO Constitution, the National Commissions operate, on a permanent basis, for the purpose of associating their governmental and non-governmental bodies in education, sciences, culture and communication with the work of the Organization. At present there are 198 National Commissions for UNESCO across the world. They constitute a truly global family with an authoritative network of stakeholders, partners and experts and offer a comparative advantage to the Organization within the United Nations system. This network plays a significant role in raising UNESCO's visibility at the country level.

### 4.2 (c) (ii) UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASP net)

Established in 1953, ASP net has been promoting quality education, human rights implementation, world heritage education, peace and human rights education, and fostering innovative good practice. Overseeing the UNESCO ASP Net, an international network of 8,000 schools in 170 countries.

### 4.2 (c) (iii) Mondialogo - Intercultural Dialogue and Exchange

Mondialogo is an international initiative launched in 2003 to encourage intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and exchange among young people. Mondialogo comprises three pillars of action: the Mondialogo School Contest, the Mondialogo Engineering Award and the Intercultural Mondialogo Internet Portal.

### 4.2 (c) (iv) UNESCO Chairs for Peace Education

The UNESCO Chairs (a component of an international network of 645 UNESCO Chairs, involving over 770 institutions

in 126 countries.) in the field of peace education promote integrated research, training, curriculum development and documentation activities related to education for peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and contribute to the development of peace education in higher education institutions.

### 4.2 (c) (v) The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is an open, global network of NGOs, UN agencies, donors, practitioners, researchers and individuals working together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction.

As member states worked together over time to realize UNESCO's mandate, political and historical factors have shaped the Organization's operations in particular, during the Cold War, the decolonization process, and the dissolution of the USSR.[23] However, it had also faced controversy and its criticism in carrying out its programs. The McBride report on New World Information and Communication order created controversy, which led to the withdrawal of the United States, UK and Singapore for some years. Recent admission of Palestine as a Member state has also caused United States to withdraw its financial support[24] from the organization.

Politicization of the organization in respect of its programs and the top-heavy personnel structure has been subjects of criticism. However, involvement of all member states in its decision-making process, increased transparency and administrative reforms leading to staff reduction and improved negotiations have kept the organization alive. Since its inception, UNESCO has recognized that non-governmental organizations and foundations which have concerns close to its own play an

important role in international cooperation in the service of peoples.

For more than half a century, UNESCO has set up a valuable network of cooperative relations with a number of organizations in its fields of competence, thereby enabling it to work with civil society in achieving its objectives and to disseminate its democratic and ethical ideals.

Currently, UNESCO is enjoying official civil society partnerships with 371 international NGOs and 22 foundations and similar institutions, which are working in the fields of competence of the organization. In addition to this formal framework, the organization has been carrying out a range of activities hand in hand with NGOs, not only at international and regional levels, but also at the national level.[25]

With its network of its five regional offices, twenty-seven cluster offices covering 148 member states, 198 National Commissions, 371 international NGOs, 22 Foundations, 645 UNESCO Chairs, 2000 staff members and 8000 associated schools, it has large potential to promote international understanding for human unity.

### 4.3 The United Nations University (UNU)

Set up in 1973 UNU The United Nations University is the sole UN entity authorized by the UN General Assembly to grant degrees as well as function as a think tank for the United Nations system. It provides a bridge between the UN and the international academic, policy-making and private sector communities.

It did not have any specific program of international understanding for human unity. However its 2010-2014 strategic plan includes as one of its five thematic clusters programs related to Peace, Security and Human Rights, Peace building and Peace

keeping, Conflict resolution and Human Security, Fostering Dialogue among Civilizations, Religions and Cultures, Human Rights and Ethics, Gender Equality and mainstreaming.

### 4.4 The University for Peace

The movement for international understanding for human unity has established for its promotion through formal education system especially degree granting higher education institution as we see in the establishment of the University for Peace in Costa Rica in 1980 by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly. In keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations the University has "the aim of promoting among all human beings, the spirit of understanding, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence to stimulate cooperation among peoples and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress."[26]. With its head quarter in Costa Rica it offers Masters programs related to International Understanding and Peace in the areas of (1) International Law and the Settlement of Disputes, (2) International Laws and Human Rights, (3) International Peace Studies, I (4) Gender and Peace Building, (5) Peace Education,(6) Media, Peace and Conflict Studies, (7) Sustainable Urban Governance and Peace and (8) Sustainable Peace in the contemporary world.

Recently it started Doctoral programs in peace and conflict studies as well.

UPEACE conducts special joint and dual degree programs in peace and security with other institutions and also Study Abroad programs, on line and on site. In addition UPEACE publishes the following journals: The Peace and Conflict Review, the On-line Peace and Conflict Monitor and Africa Peace and Conflict Journal.

The UPEACE has the following regional programs.

Africa Program started in 2002 delivering short courses, workshops, conference seminars in various parts of Africa, it now offers full-fledged Masters degree programs working with a number of partner universities. The principal aim is to build local capacity for a better understanding of conflicts in Africa, their prevention and the creation of an environment favourable to lasting peace and development.

In the Asia-Pacific region the UPEACE Asia- Pacific Centre established in Seoul in 2010 provides Masters level post-graduate studies. The Asia Leaders Program shared between UPEACE and Nippon Foundation offers postgraduate degree in collaboration with Ateneo de Manila University of Philippines.

In Europe, the Geneva of UPEACE established in 2001 offers expert support from the international community in Geneva to the University for the Africa Program.

In addition, started in 2012 in the Hague, UPEACE The Hague focuses on education and research in three fields: Peace & Conflict Studies, Water & Peace and Urban Peace & Security.

The UPEACE has in its Article 4 of the Charter provision for entering into " concluding agreements with Government, Intergovernmental and other organizations and institutions in the field of education". It has signed such agreements with Serbia, Colombia and Uruguay. These affiliated institutions called centres enjoy autonomy and academic freedom while keeping their humanistic purpose following the Charters of the University, of the United Nations and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

UPEACE has produced hundreds of graduates from over 100 countries working on peace related activities in their home countries and abroad, often in the front-lines of conflict situations, in NGOs, academic and intergovernmental institutions including

the UN. UPEACE aims to instill in their students a world vision in order to transform conflicts and promote sustainable peace and security. Its Africa program attracted close to 1000 participants from Academia, Policy makers and Civil society organizations during the first five years.[27]

### 4.5 The Course on International Understanding for Human Unity

A modest effort to promote international understanding for human unity was launched in 2005 by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission described in Section 3. It has the following objectives:

"Promote a high level of critical awareness of the basic unity underlying cultural diversity.Foster unity and retaining the essential elements of cultural diversity. Assess the nature of the difficulties in upholding co-operation, understanding and mutual appreciation of various cultural systems. Relate the modern realities with the rich insight of Indian philosophical (especially Vedantic) tradition. Transmit the message of Human Understanding to a wider audience through the participants in the program."[28]

Graduates in any discipline, with a proven inclination to grasp international issues can join the course which is held twice a week of two hours duration each day for 9 months and receive a certificate of attendance. Supported by UNESCO's Social Science Sector the course faculty consists of highly placed academics, opinion leaders, professionals, media persons, spiritual personalities, public dignitaries, high officials from UNESCO and foreign missions. The message of Swami Vivekananda was the inspiration behind the above course. We shall elaborate in the next section on the Swami's ideas and how they can be relevant and useful for the promotion of international understanding for human unity today.

## 5. The Relevance of the Message of Swami Vivekananda on universalism based on "Practical Vedanta" in promoting international understanding

The Director General of UNESCO in his inaugural speech for the Centenary Celebration of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago mentioned in Section 3, made the following statement about the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's message for human unity today. "...first his commitment towards universalism and tolerance, his active identification with humanity as a whole"...

"second his concern for the poor and the destitute". The director General continued, "the mission he established in India and which has now spread all over the world, is working to reduce poverty and eliminate discrimination among the different segments of society. There is no other important challenge for us all than striving to overcome these problems at their roots; and it is one that I believe the United Nations, working with all possible NGO partners, must make its absolute priority in the years to come; third, his preoccupation with human development and his vision of education, science and culture as the essential instruments for such development". He continued:

"I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitutions of the Ramakrishna Mission established as early as 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945. Both place the human being at the centre of their efforts aimed at development. Both place tolerance at the top of the agenda for building peace and democracy. Both recognise the variety of human cultures and societies as an essential aspect of the common heritage."[29]

Religion being the unifying source on the one hand and dividing force on the other plays an important role in training the human mind. Swami Vivekananda's concept of international understanding originates from his commitment towards

universalism in religions based on Practical Vedanta. I quote from his speech in the World Parliament:

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee".[30]

He expressed his commitment towards universalism to one of his colleagues as follows.

"Make sure that the universalist attitude is not hampered in any way. Everything must be sacrificed, if necessary, for that one sentiment—universality…universality—perfect acceptance, not tolerance only, we preach and perform."[31]

In his lecture in London in 1996, on Practical Vedanta he comes out with a "practical plan" to harmonise the various religions as follows.

"We find that this recognition that all the various views of religion are true has been very very old. Hundreds of attempts have been made in India, in Alexandria, in Europe, in China, in Japan, in Tibet, and lastly in America, to formulate a harmonious religious creed, to make all religions come together in love. They have all failed, because they did not adopt any practical plan. Many have admitted that all the religions of the world are right, but they show no practical way of bringing them together, so as to enable each of them to maintain its own individuality in the conflux. That plan alone is practical, which does not destroy the individuality of any man in religion and at the same time shows him a point of union with all others. But so far, all the plans of religious harmony that have been tried, while proposing to take in all the various views of religion, have, in practice, tried to bind them all down to a few doctrines, and so have produced more new sects, fighting, struggling, and pushing against each other. I have also my little plan. I do not know whether it will work or not,

and I want to present it to you for discussion. What is my plan? In the first place I would ask mankind to recognise this maxim, "Do not destroy". Iconoclastic reformers do no good to the world. Break not, pull not anything down, but build. Help, if you can; if you cannot, fold your hands and stand by and see things go on. Do not injure, if you cannot render help. Say not a word against any man's convictions so far as they are sincere. Secondly, take man where he stands, and from there give him a lift. If it were true that God is the centre of all religions, and that each of us is moving towards Him along one of these radii, then it is certain that all of us must reach that centre. And at the centre, where all the radii meet, all our differences will cease; but until we reach there, differences there must be. All these radii converge to the same centre. One, according to his nature, travels along one of these lines, and another, along another; and if we all push onward along our own lines, we shall surely come to the centre, because, "All roads lead to Rome". Each of us is naturally growing and developing according to his own nature; each will in time come to know the highest truth for after all, men must teach themselves."[32]

In today's world inflicted with terrorism, hatred and violence, humanity is disunited. Most of it is in the name of religion. His practical plan for harmonizing the humankind detailed above becomes more important today than it was in his own time.

For the welfare of mankind and to the promotion of human unity he said:

"Help and not Fight."

"Assimilation and not Destruction."

"Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."

"...Each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."[33]

"Feel for the miserable and look up for help—it shall come."[34]

"It is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better."[35]

"No civilization can grow unless fanaticism, bloodshed and brutality stop."[36]

"Material civilization –nay even luxury – is necessary to create work for the poor. I don't believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal peace in heaven."[37]

The above list applies much to the individuals as to the countries.

We can note that although Swamiji spoke about "universal religion" giving importance to spiritual values as a unifying force for humanity working through the mind he also emphasized the need for secular values to eradicate poverty, creation of work for a living, to eliminate inequality and discrimination and corruption which are some of the causes of human disunity and rise of "fanaticism, bloodshed and brutality."[38]

According to the UNESCO constitution cited earlier:

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed". Education's role becomes essential in the construction of that defence. Swamiji's message therefore has to be propagated through education. We mention below some of the strategies to do so.

## 6. Some educational strategies to implement Vivekananda's ideas

First I shall describe how some current thinkers on international understanding for human unity have thought the same way as Swamiji thought in his time.

In a speech delivered by Bill Clinton, the 42nd President of the United States at the Yale University on 31 October 2003 said:

"I believe that fundamentalism — the sense that you have the certain truth and the entitlement to impose it on others – is not

well suited to solving the problems of the modern world in either religion or politics. It is far better to deal with these problems using evidence and argument, with a willingness to experiment."

He gives some hints in this direction and I quote him again:

"I think the great mission of the 21st century is to create a genuine global community, to move from mere interdependence to integration, to a community that has shared responsibilities, shared benefits and shared values. How would we go about building that kind of world? ...(one of the main responsibilities) is to build institutions of global co-operation, so that people get into a habit of resolving their differences in a peaceful way, according to rules and procedures generally perceived to be fair."[39]

To do so and more I suggest the following strategies:

Strategy 1:

UNESCO should adopt a resolution for promotion of international understanding for human unity through the National Commissions of Member States in the countries' educational institutions. The education and other sectors will revitalize their programs on education for the culture of peace, human rights and democracy by redesigning them to suit the current situation and adaptable to different socio-cultural contexts and supply them to the commissions and follow up with them for their adoption and use.

Strategy 2:

To design, legislate and execute a national policy for institutions of learning for global cooperation based on the ideas of international understanding as articulated by Swami Vivekananda and supported by a suitable organizational structure and offering programs to face the spiritual and secular crisis of the world today.

Strategy 3:

To integrate formal, non-formal and informal learning and in-school and out of school programs on international understanding for human unity and deliver them involving the NGOs and the civil society.

Strategy 4:

To build alliance with relevant stakeholders in maintaining peace and international harmony: the government with its different ministries (e.g. education, labour and social welfare, women's affairs, health, finance among others), non-governmental organizations, the community, private sector, institutions of education and employment and most importantly, the media to design suitable programs, execute and evaluate them in co-operation with each other.

Strategy 5:

To prepare action plans for learning programs that will promote a positive attitude and facilitate learning on characteristics facilitating international understanding. We shall deal with different levels and forms:

• Prenatal period

Scientists say that learning starts three weeks after conception during the prenatal period. Mother's behavior during this period affects the development of the foetus.

Provision of education for the mothers for healthy development of the fetus with appropriate physical and mental exercise (e.g. yoga, meditation etc.) The mothers should have access to an environment so as to maintain a peaceful and spiritual mind. That will allow the future child to grow up with love and affection for others, basic elements for human unity.

• Preschool education

o Imparting attitudes of love and affection among infants of different social and religious background playing and learning together.

o Diversifying provisions, exposing them to children of different regions, races and colours through cartoons adapted for children.

• Compulsory education upwards

o Identifying in curricula desirable core skills including respect for other cultures, ethical skills and family values.

o Exposing them to the fact that all religions have been established for the good of humanity.

o Imparting the attitude of sharing, helping the poor and the disadvantaged.

• Upper secondary education

o Emphasizing core skills including family values, respect of other cultures, morals and ethics, comparative religion and culture in the content.

o Developing co-operation between schools and institutions practising respect for different cultures and religions.

o Organizing discussion on comparative religion, international understanding and conflict resolution.

o Organizing extracurricular activities on social and community service.

• Higher Education

The action plan should include courses on

o Peace education.

o International Law and Human rights.

o Settlement of Disputes and International Law.

o Media, Peace and Conflict Studies.

o Gender and Peace Building.

o More details of the action plan for higher education can be obtained from the University for Peace discussed in Section 4.3

• Adult Education

The action plan may take its hints from the course offered by our host. The Course-structure is multi-disciplinary, giving the main branches of human knowledge their due share in the formation of a culture of global unity. Ingredients of the best insights from the social, physical, mental, moral, philosophical and legal sciences should be woven into the course-fabric. Certain activities in the spheres of Music, Medicine, Media reporting, Painting and Environment awareness etc. should also find due exposition in the program.

The organization of the program should proceed with lectures, but will also hinge on vigorous classroom interaction. Study materials comprising lecture notes and references should be distributed to help meaningful interaction during lecture sessions. Peer-group discussions, debates and even 'brain-storming' sessions may also be held to enliven the learning process. The timing of the program should suit the availability of the adult population.

The program should encourage and facilitate access for adults through

o Use of methods suited for them.

o Providing maximum flexibility in timetables and admission.

o Exploiting the potentials of distance education.

Strategy 6:

The action plan should be across the levels and wherever relevant promote:

• Policy dialogues with potential sponsors of learning for international understanding.

• Girls' participation and participation of weaker sections of the society through rational incentive measures and empowerment programs.

• Interconnections of informal education with formal and non-formal education so that the former could complement and strengthen existing learning opportunities.

• Exposure to diverse cultural information and experiences to the learners with a multi media approach.

• Culture learning programs which recognize that our own cultural models are not absolute and that values, attitudes and behaviours are culture bound. (One could design a 'culture-in-contact' program based on information and materials collected from the various experiences of two individuals interacting with one another in diverse cultural contexts. These simulation materials would help develop their cognitive, affective and interpersonal skills in coping with cultural diversity. This has been applied in a school with success in Germany.[40]

• Multilingual learning as this helps learners understand and appreciate diverse cultures better.

Strategy 7:

To promote research on international understanding for human unity.

• To create an inventory of program of education for international understanding.

• To identify suitable frameworks to take into consideration the different dimensions of international understanding and their educational implications.

• To get a more 'nuanced' lifelong learning landscape using both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the form of collection of good practices or monitoring and evaluation of existing practices in international understanding for human unity.

## 7. Concluding remarks:

In his address in the World Parliament of Religions on 11 September, 1893 Swami Vivekananda proclaimed:

"I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

Paradoxically, it is the same day on11 September 2001 a group of fanatics chose to kill about three thousand people and injure many more by destroying the twin towers of New York and giving a new turn to international terrorism. Since then we have seen several significant changes in our way of life: the increasing use of technology by the terrorists for destructive purposes, continuing civil wars, increasing rise of nationalism and territorial disputes, more recently, the cyber war, the increasing inequality among people, increasing corruption due to an unregulated market and the financial crisis in the Western world leading the balance of economic power towards the east and reducing the capacity of the traditional power base to intervene. On the other hand we are also observing the urge towards liberty against domestic tyranny or arbitrary rule, increasing use of social media for the public up-rise seeking liberty (for example, the Arab Spring), increasing democracy (for example, disintegration of the Soviet Union), increasing efforts of regional powers to resolve regional conflicts, increasing use of negotiating skills, increasing humaneness, a concern for social welfare, increasing community sense and growing exposure of and resulting repudiation of violent or physical coercion and an increasing interest in comparative religion and acceptance of other beliefs, customs and traditions. The combination of spiritual and secular values in Swami Vivekananda's "practical plan" in the vedantic spirit gives us optimism. In the words of Nobel Laureate Emily Greene Balch spoken in 1946 in her Nobel lecture which I find valid today:

"We are not asked to any utopia or to believe in a perfect world just around the corner. We are asked to be patient with a necessarily slow and groping advance on the road forward, and to be ready for each step ahead as it becomes practicable. We are asked to equip ourselves with courage, hope, readiness for hard work and to cherish large and generous ideal."[41]

In the same context Swami Vivekananda also had his own words of optimism and encouragement:

"Be not in despair, the way is very difficult, like walking on the edge of a razor; yet, despair not, arise awake, and find the ideal, the goal".[42]

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# Politcal Practice and Marginalisation of Cultural Unity

Radharaman Chakrabarti

'Culture' is what we *are* partly because of what we *have* but mainly because of what we *aspire for*. Defined in these simple terms, culture of a people or community registers both an existing status at a particular point of time, and also signifies a goal towards which a culture could be heading over time, depending on the potentials it generates in transit. Culture, therefore, is both being and becoming. It is ever evolving; and where it is not evolving any more, civilization there must have started stagnating. In its progressive evolution culture takes men to qualitatively higher levels of existence, and of the many parameters by which this progress can be assessed is the degree of cohesion it creates or fails to create. There is practically no certainty that a civilization would necessarily produce cultural unity. There are instances in human history in which civilizations made quantum jump – as in the case of the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Aryans, the Dravidians of ancient times, and at a much later period the post – renaissance European nations. In each such case there have been varying degrees of success in achieving cultural unity of an enduring nature.

As a student of the subject I think politics has a considerable role to play to facilitate cultural cohesion if not the unity of a solid type. India as it stands today appears to be a good test case, particularly since we so often wax sentimental about those golden days when the 'mantra' of universal harmony (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) was uttered and tend to believe that mantra still permeates our lives.

Post – independence India stands out as an instance where political practice impinges strongly and regularly on the cultural trajectory of the communities who coexist here. At the same time it is fast losing the old ethos of cultural togetherness. It suffers now from a continuing tension arising from the super imposition of politics in every sphere. Political prudence (or perhaps lack of it) has chosen to marginalize the concern for cultural unity. The ongoing agenda of political agencies puts misplaced premium on culture promotion. An apparent eagerness on their part to appear to be working even handed in relation to the culture groups has led to a lot of avoidable misgivings. In its overall endeavour to consolidate the gains from national liberation from alien rule, the post – colonial State of India has actually failed to transfer those gains to the cultural sphere, and where it tried ,the consequences have been questionable.

The resultant scenario has been one of a bizarre coexistence of a flourishing high status, hybrid culture with smaller popular cultures scattered over the country and struggling for self-preservation. Not that those which are thus getting marginalized are losers all the way. Some of them did stand their ground. But the unsavoury part of it is that there is an all round tension. Political forces operating from inside and those from outside either collaborate or clash. In any case the net effect is far from the sustenance of a stable cultural relationship among the groups. The urgency of cultural unity gets subordinated to the exigencies of political practice. The resultant situation can be analysed from three angels viz. a) the constitutional frame of cultural politics b) policy dispensation by government and c) allied factors active in the market oriented political economy.

(A) The Constitution of India is known for its bulk, and yet to become workable it must add an amendment or two almost every year. Call it the necessary dynamics of democracy in a large and

highly differentiated society. But the true reason lies in the prevarications of the political class in handling emerging situations. At its inception the constitution makers were alive to the possibility of tensions appearing in society, especially as the period of constitution making was itself marked by turmoils following partition of the country. However, the extent of complications that would arise with the unfolding of politics in much later years could not have seized their attention. They were mostly concerned with assuring the minority groups, particularly the huge left over of Muslims even after the creation of an Islamic State at their political leaders' demand. The relevant provisions of the original constitution in its Article 29 and 30 had the sole purpose of assuring the minorities that "some *special interests* of theirs which *they* cherish as fundamentals to *their* life are safe under the constitution[1] These relate to right to religious freedom and, by extension, its concomitant freedom to maintain separate educational institutions.

Incidentally, the expression 'minority' has been given a wide denotation including within its fold linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups, in addition to the religious minorities. We will come to a consideration of this ramification. But the tenor of the debates in the Constituent Assembly in this regard cannot but arrest our attention. This is typically expressed in the following para of the Report of the Minority Rights Committee :

"Minorities in every unit shall be protected in respect of their language, script and culture, and no laws and regulations may be enacted that may operate *oppressively or prejudicially* in this respect".[2]

One wonders what made the Hon'ble Member apprehend such "oppression and prejudice" coming from the would be ruling class. Even Muslims who left India had other reasons to do so i.e. the lure of a non – Hindu State more than any imagined fear of

minority bashing by the Indian State. Dr. Ambedkar was more level headed to point out that it was going to be no business of the State to sponsor or finance "any project of giving education to such minorities"..."The only limitation is that if the minority wants to preserve its language etc. the State shall not by law impose upon it any other culture which may be local or otherwise"[3]

Fair enough, for it implied a doctrine of '*cultural neutrality*' on the part of the State, almost a parallel of supposed '*religious neutrality*' indicated by the provisions concerning religious rights. But the fact of the matter is that neutrality soon yielded place to strategically crafted patronage of the State, encouraging the minorities to go ahead with their plans of imparting education and cultivating cultural mores that would be patently exclusionist. In matters of religious sensibilities of the minorities, the same strategy again was conveniently applied – putting every conceivable brake on the majoritarian religious effervescence but practically none on equivalent initiatives of the minority. Eventually this skewed patronage became an inevitable part of the political agenda of almost all political parties, whatever their secular pretension.

Remarkably, the constitution does not preclude the presence of any non-secular organization in the actual arena of politics. That naturally helped a pre-positioning in the realm of policy dispensation (to be taken up later in this presentation). Let us meanwhile revert to another side of the Constituent Assembly debates. Some honourable members apprehended an undue concession to forces who might use the restrictive provisions of the Constitution to encourage fissiparous tendencies in the country. Worth quoting is the observation of *Shri Damodar Swarup Singh* who feared "educational institutions based on religion or community will block the national unity and secularism,

and promote communalism and a narrow antinational out-look.[4] To Damodar Swarup providing this autonomy to linguistic minorities upto the Secondary level of education should be considered natural and sufficient enough. The rest ought to be uniform for all citizens irrespective of group affiliation.

This integrationist view, however, did not make much dent on the majority of members who were anxious to be seen as liberally disposed only to the minorities. Among them there was the optimist K. Santhanam who took a balanced view on Art. 29 as he said : "The problems of *religious minorities* and scheduled castes are legacies of the past and I expect that in the near future they *will simply lapse* owing to the lapse of time and owing to circumstances. But the question of *linguistic minorities* will be problem for many decades to come and, I am afraid, is going to cause the country a great deal of trouble"[5]

Santham made a distinction between the two types of minority — religious and linguistic. Now, whether we talk about religious, linguistic or caste minorities, we can see that the old divide did not diminish, far less disappear even after six decades of independence. While the continuing post-colonial hangover of the past has much to do with later political practice, one cannot overlook the fact that the strength of this concessional politics, could, very well be, attributed to the provisions of the constitution being open to such interpretation. All the same, minority – majority interface in our country runs into difficulties because mainly of the sociological reality that the minorities are used to forming islands of their own in a vast multitude of religious, multilingual, multi-ethnic environment. Any prospect of the historical process of 'mingling' if not assimilation' of the minorities with the majority culture is frustrated by this very approach of cultural desegregation. Why talk about majority ? Inter-minorities dialogue is also nearly absent in India. The

overall feeling can therefore be one of peoples perpetually thrown into a competitive milieu with little impetus for collaboration or at least dialogue. Each community looks upon itself as having a constitutionally safeguarded cultural cocoon. Inbreeding takes precedence over cross – breeding.

We can, of course, come across a different or rather an alternative route left open for the State to be proactive in the cultural field. This is found in Article 30(1) of the constitution which, according to Chief Justice S.R. Das, [6] does not say that minorities based on religions should establish minorities educational institutions *for teaching religion only*, or that linguistic minorities should have the right to establish educational institutions for *teaching their language only* .... Educational institutions of their choice will necessarily include institutions imparting general secular education also."

The minority institutions also demand complete independence of State control in respect of their internal administration. But in another case involving the Anglo-Indian educational institutions in Kerala, the Chief Justice said that the "*right to administer* could not obviously include the *right to maladminister*" : It should be perfectly within the competence of the State to ensure that this is not so. However, this view of the desirability of necessary corrective has not been received with any great enthusiasm, and hence generally restricted State intervention, if at all, in the case of institutions receiving government aid.

In fact if the underlying spirit of the constitution is to uphold the outlook of non-discrimination and hospitality to all communities staying in this country, it needs to be also understood that the constitution is there not for any particular community or section but for all. Following from that a point does arise whether this hospitable dispensation could become more meaningful when it is also used as facilitating a common meeting point somewhere

of the diverse cultures. Upholding parochialism cannot possibly be the justification for enjoying communal autonomy. As long as there is a reluctance to read the minority safeguards in this light, and a favoured or pampered class approach takes the upper hand "the guarantees meant to project the minorities would become, in effect the palladiums of special privileges".(7) These privileges now have a tendency to block any integrated national move on educational front to realize a social order in which justice "shall inform all institutions of the national life." And justice does not stop at status quo; it does permit a forward looking and expanding mentality. Going by all available indications such a progressive construction is yet to arrive and elevate the public mind from a narrowly construed constitutional order. The consequence now is this : the rights which have been granted in all fairness to the minorities can and does impact the rest of the people, even one minority vis-à-vis another.

This is particularly important in view of the geo-demographic picture of the country in which religious minorities are not concentrated in some specific pockets but spread out all over the country. So also the linguistic minorities have varying status according to their varying locus. In a sense every such community becomes a minority when members of it move out and settle in states which is not their state of origin. There is therefore good deal of fluidity in the situation that has developed over the years. Any restrictive, interpretative and/or purely concessional view of the constitutional provision could be and has been self-defeating, if not pernicious. For the ruling class and the political parties this has generated a tendency not to go far enough to consider any programme that promotes synthesis of cultures at the national level.

We may now move over to the policy dispensations of the government. For want of space and time, the discussion will be

confined to some major thrust areas under the Union government. It should be recognized though that State governments have also their share of responsibility, education and culture having come under concurrent jurisdiction. So far as the central authorities are concerned, it is difficult to find any comprehensive policy papers or official statements that have direct bearing on cultural unity. Way back in July 1954 The Govt. of India under the Ministry of Information brought out a slim volume with the title CULTURAL UNITY OF INDIA written by one Gertrude Emerson Sen. In this work, after a fairly good survey of the roots of Indian culture and the cultural continuity from the early period, a chapter on Modern Synthesis appears at the end. There the issue of unity is presented as follows :

"An intense interest in ideas and a willingness to see them pursued ... has indeed always characterized the Indian outlook. Modifications, required by changed political status and objective of free India, in old mental attitudes and habits should cause no serious difficulty provided, of course that the fundamentals of Indian culture are not violated."(p64) The question is : What are these fundamentals and has there been any express consensus on that point?

"What are the outstanding objectives before the country? They can be summed up as maintaining political freedom ensuring to the Indian people opportunities for a better and fuller life, spiritually, physically intellectually and materially and contributing to international peace and good will."[8]

The early initiatives on national integration had some reference to the need of building a common cultural bond of the different communities but nothing concrete came out of the integration initiative. By the time the 65th year of Republic (the 16th Lok sabha) arrives, the urgency of integration as an expression of any public policy will have become much too feeble.

The syndrome of coalition government has now gone deep into the political psyche of the civil society. Government has become an object of bargain as political parties – major/minor, national/regional – are out on free-for-all to ensure electoral success. That apart, what we notice so far is a programme of elaborate institution – building in giving a fillip to the growth and enrichment of local cultures in its various manifestation. A few central nodal bodies have also been set up and are consistently engaged in their respective pursuits. Of them mention may be made of the seven zonal cultural centres that have been set up, taking note of the principal local variations of culture and cultural pursuits. [East, West, North, South plus (North Central, Northeastern, South Central & South Zones)]. These zonal councils are mostly engaged in providing all forms of assistance and mediation as may be necessary to let local cultures flourish, talents recognized and innovations rewarded. At the highest national level there are Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, the Sangeet Natak and the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Sahitya Akademi. Additionally there is the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, and on the academic side the Asiatic Society, the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies deserve mention.

Through all these bodies the Ministries of Culture and of Human Resource Development are trying to develop a pool of regional cultures and contributing to the progress of sub-cultures in different regions. On the whole, the effort is to evolve a federalized culture policy, which would accommodate the developed as well as the less developed cultures. The main difficulties in their functioning arise from bureaucratization and routinization of their activities. Administrative bosses and cultural personalities are not always on the same wave length. Keeping

the 'other' in good humour takes more time than serious deliberations over cultural interface.

Besides there is the more serious reservation arising from the absence of any national focus to evolve out of the various cultures coming together. The occasional cultural soirees and deputation of performing troupes contribute to that objective only in a limited and remote sense. Promoting local cultures is certainly a laudable idea. But that cannot be the be-all and end-all. For, an Indian cultural unity should deserve more vigorous interaction. Of course, one can argue that there cannot be a single, overriding theme in culture as such. Variety is what the Indian culture is ultimately all about. Nonetheless, it does not serve the interest of cultural diversity if the objective of uinity is taken at a discount, or if it gets marginalized at the policy making level. That would convey a distressingly wrong message to the public – both informed and uninformed. The informed public with whom rests the primary task of energizing different smaller culture groups to come under a common larger platform would be dissuaded from doing anything of the sort – as though that is not in national interest, as officially defined. For the common run of the people, coming out of their familiar habitat of culture would be as precarious as opening the door to outsiders of strange antecedents. In the long run, society would stop producing a Narendranath Datta, or a James Long or a Syed Mujtaba Ali.

Another sensitive area where the centripetal inclination of cultures gets arrested is that of linguistic separatism. In a country which boasts of 17 major languages and nearly 1652 dialects[9] the primary concern today is to ensure the safety and survival of the smaller species. Not that there is a deliberate assault coming from the stronger and larger language groups. The greater part of the pressures are coming from modernization represented by integrated markets, frequency and volume of human mobility,

linguistic fashion/style set by the media and then of course regularity of urban – rural exchange. Some sort of fusion – not homogenization, and hence perhaps a little confusing, is becoming unavoidable day by day. In this context, the virtues of multilingualism need more vigorous projection, giving some life line to the languishing languages.

But then the point that is getting drowned in this over all din and bustle of modernization is the simple truth that speaking a different language or practising different social customs need not arrest normal aggregative development of societies. Rather the vitatity of multilingual, multi-cultural societies is exalted if the agencies of modernization, especially mass contact and mass communication are properly geared to that end. The trees that are getting taller must themselves leave enough space in between to let the smaller plants sprout forth.

This is all very sensible, particularly in the cherished wisdom of India in favour of a multi-cultural scheme of thing. But the question remains : did that wisdom stop at that ? Did it not also hold out an ultimate goal to strive for – where autonomy does not end up in many cultures just coexisting but sets them on a path to discover a basic unity? The wonderful expression in the divine dialogue of the Gita अविभक्तेषु विभक्ति वत् is a pointer to this higher aim. It implies that cherishing the particulars is not intended to keep them apart but to help them mature into a magnificent whole. Now, just as there cannot be a readymade blue print to delineate the nature of that anticipated whole well in advance, so also the transition of multiculturalism into a refined sense of solidarity cannot be a self fulfilling experiment. If it is left to be chance–directed one does not know where it might ultimately end up. Some sort of a conscious move will therefore be necessary to keep alive the urge for solidarity through dialogue, through exchanges, through collaboration and through

highlighting the common traits. That does not require a central clearance of cultural trends as in the case of cheques in the banking system. What it needs is a readiness of the particulars to appreciate and internalize common traits that they can and must develop.

Since we are dealing with political practice, let us see how far politics has been helpful in promoting this *culture of mutual appreciation*. In the context of linguistic pluralism the standard practice of the State has been to assuage its virulence by aligning State boundaries along major language boundaries – missing thereby two things – namely (1) there could be many more fissures and fault lines which would surface even within the reorgnized state boundaries and (2) language itself being an emotive issue gets easily mixed up with ethnic sensitivities and assume a much larger challenge to any one-time cultural alignment. Furthermore, when these methods of territorial engineering hold out projects of political and other 'attending gains', advocacy of cultural separatism becomes a lucrative agenda for the political parties. It creates a new pasture to be cultivated for power politics. Vidarbha, Chhatisgarh, Telengana and Gorkheland are live examples of how coexistence of smaller cultures gets easily interrupted because of larger political stakes spun out of their other grievances, not necessarily culture-related. Animosities generated by political short sightedness and administrative mismanagement get expressed in cultural terms and ruin the prospects, if any, of mutual accommodation. If language barrier was the main factor responsible for cultural distance, it could have a much better and purely non-political remedy. As a perceptive writer observed elsewhere: "Multilingual speakers switch from one language to the other, or those who are monolingual switch styles".[10] True, the switch over from the Indo-Aryan to the Dravidian language is not an

easy proposition and the difficulties can only be obviated by greater mobility of people from one region to the other. For cultural products like literature, translation or transcreation, as may be appropriate, could ease the situation, the way the two immortal epics became a treasure trove in every household of India. In the case of music – vocal or instrumental, one does already have a common classical base which facilitates transferability of tunes and even lyrics. For visual entertainment, Bollywood is a great unifier and can easily mediate between local productions. Moreover, and this is a fast spreading phenomenon, that is the spoken language increasingly becoming a trilingual mixture of English, Hindi and any local language. And, along with tourism, business, technical education and media manoeuver, one can visualize the slow but steady emergence of a pan-Indian dialogic language. Pilgrimage in earlier times, even among different faiths, was not deterred because of language differences from place to place.

The point I am trying to make is that it takes intense popular urges and civil society initiatives for many cultures to coagulate. For politics to enter into this fluid zone, the appointed task is not to aggravate the markers of differentiation but to stimulate the spirit of mutual interest and mutual appreciation for mutual enrichment. This is not to say that creation of new states would be a bad proposition in every case though a forced fragmentation and a manoeuvered split certainly will be. Political practice as it is going on in this country is predicated upon a crude game of power politics and is seldom informed by any sensible ideology of adjustment and accommodation. That ideology is an indispensable condition to let things settle for a reasonable length of time so as to encourage amalgamation wherever that is warranted. Why should it be a diehard attitude of the political class to instigate separatism and never ever speak in terms of

regional and local level integration. In the sixtyfive years of the Republic, not a single instance arose of two or more communities, despite living close by, also having forged some sort of a common cultural enclave. Hence one hopelessly concludes in the words of the poet Yeats "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold".

The perverse practice of multilingualism and multi-ethnicity has given rise to strife – intergroup and inter-grup, between castes and subcastes, between sons of soil and incoming settlers. With displacement of the English language, area-based 'Bhasa elites'[11] mostly representing caste – aspirations achieved an ascendancy. This constitutes another impediment to the growth of national outlook. One cannot therefore rely on the theory of automatic consensus to develop because the narrowly conceived political agenda of the parties never allowed the time and space needed for that. The of quoted statement "Indian literature is one written in many languages" could easily apply to the larger sphere of culture if the language of politics were consciously directed to the growth of an Indian politics over and above regional and provincial politics. Illustrative of what good literature could do is the "unity of literary expressions, despite linguistic varieties" as has been illustrated by Kalidas's *Shakuntala*. In it not only the heaven meets the earth aesthetically but a beautifully crafted literary mosaic was put up with four languages – Sanskrit, Sauraseni, Magadhi and Maharashtra – liberally used. If that elevates the literary value of an immortal drama, why should politics, which seems almost akin to a drama, not aspire for an exemplary quality of being assimilative and not divisive all the way. Clearly that does not happen and hence the very concern for cultural unity is getting increasingly marginalized. Perhaps we need to introspect our political culture before we dare touch the already distressed cultural scenario on the whole.

One final word about a country's culture remaining unadulterated. Usually a distinction is made between high culture

– sophisticated, urbane, conservative and often inaccessible and the commoners' culture or popular culture which is open and hence susceptible to external influences of all description. So when we talk about cultural unity of India we invariably stop at this crossroads – there on the one hand we find India of the privileged and on the other hand Bharat of the *Aam Admi*. Ordinarily this binary arrangement is likely to issue in what goes by the name "Cultural hegemony" – a potent weapon of the ruling class, in Gramscian[12] terms, to perpetual their hegemony. It may at some point or other lead to confrontation of sorts, particularly when the so-called low or popular cultures get trivialized, looked down upon, and even silenced by main stream vanity. But in India, as of now, that moment may not have arrived. Perhaps will not. This is because in a complex pluralist order any implosion has some built-in shock absorbers. But the interesting change that has meanwhile come about is the susceptibility of both these layers of culture toward the impulses of a market – oriented political economy that the country has embraced in the current era of liberalization. What is actually happening is the ascendancy of a mass culture in which tastes and preferences, measures of excellence are getting standardized. Techno-aided propagation of culture is taking the lead ahead of other culture variants. One wonders if this is not going to result in an artificial homogenization, whether this is not putting a high premium on the spontaneous growth of autonomous cultures, and whether all this will not add to retardation of a healthy inter cultural dialogue in the country. Add to this the fear flowing from our constitutional dispensation and political practice that efforts at cultural assimilation or cultural fusion would perhaps destabilize the present status quo of composite culture. This fear has such a grip on the public mind today that promotional activities for intercultural dialogue gets cold - shouldered in real time political practice.

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# Fifth Academic Session

# Global Ecology As a Mass-Driven Initiative Towards Unity

Pravrajika Vrajaprana

One of the most sacred and the ancient hymns of the Ṛg-Veda envision the created Universe as saturated with honey and bliss:

*madhu vātā ṛtāyate*
*madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ*
*mādhvīrnaḥ santvoṣadhīḥ*
*madhu naktaṁ mutoṣasi*
*madhumat pārthivaṁ rajaḥ*
*madhu dyaurastu naḥ pitā*
*madhumān to vanaspatih*
*madhumānastu sūryaḥ*
*mādhvīrgāvo bhavantu naḥ*
*oṁ madhu, madhu, madhu*[1]

An approximate English translation for this magnificent hymn is:

May the winds blow sweetly,
May the rivers flow sweetly,
May plants and herbs be sweet to us,
May night and morning be sweet to us,
May the dust of the earth be sweet to us,
May the heavens be sweet to us,
May the trees be sweet to us,
May the sun shine on us sweetly,
May the cows yield us sweet milk.

How far our vision has fallen from that of the ancient *ṛṣis*, whose ecstatic words came out from the depths of their spiritual realization! Today we find our winds fouled by industrial pollution. The rivers are contaminated by sewage and the toxic effluence of myriad industries. The plants and herbs that have sustained us for thousands of years have been decimated and wasted by pesticides, while our trees have been clear-cut for grassland or fuel. The heavens that once protected us now have an expanding hole in the ozone layer. The sun that once kindly looked down upon us now glowers, as the effects of global warming become increasingly pronounced with each passing year. .The cows' milk, once so sweet and fresh, is tainted by toxic contaminants.

How could we have come to this? The Vedic *Ṛṣi's* rapturous vision of the environment as the dwelling place of the divine, has, in recent decades, become a heartbreaking nightmare. So dire is the situation that environmental degradation now poses a serious threat to life on the planet. It is no accident that one of the UN Millennium Development Goals (Target 7B) is to "integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources," while another one is to "reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss" (Target 7B).[2]

These twin target goals will be difficult to achieve, and will be achievable *only* if the outpouring of the masses becomes loud and insistent, demanding that these goals be met. Further, elected officials will have to be held accountable for these goals' achievement. The outlook today, while not entirely without hope, is nonetheless bleak. Biodiversity loss has already reached tragic proportions. Before human beings walked the Earth, a species became extinct approximately every thousand years. Now it is approximately every twenty minutes.

According to a 1998 survey of 400 biologists conducted by New York's American Museum of Natural History, nearly 70% believed that we are currently in the early stages of a human-caused extinction, known as the Holocene Extinction. Similarly, 70% of these biologists agreed that up to 20% of all living populations could become extinct within thirty years (i.e., by 2028). Edward O. Wilson, the world's leading authority on biodiversity and Emeritus Professor of Biology at Harvard University, said:

Biocide is occurring at an alarming rate. Experts say that at least half of the world's current species will be completely gone by the end of the century. Wild plant-life is also disappearing. Most biologists say that we are in the midst of an anthropogenic mass extinction. Numerous scientific studies confirm that this phenomenon is real and happening right now. Should anyone really care? Will it impact individuals on a personal level? Scientists say, "Yes!"[3]

A resounding, uncompromising and universal "yes!" from the mass of humanity is the only thing that will bring the reality of environmental destruction home; only this can drive the Global Ecology Movement to success on a global scale. And unless this movement reaches global proportions and crosses economic, social and religious divides, there *can* be no success.

The Global Ecology Movement is a mass-driven movement that had its inception with the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, detailing the environmental devastation surrounding the widespread use of pesticides. Issuing a clarion call for a then-unknown crisis, *Silent Spring* and the public's response to it was responsible for the United States' ban on DDT in 1972.[4] Other nations have since followed suit. Since that time, the ecological movement has accelerated and burgeoned across the world. Over a half-century after the book's publication,

environmental devastation has greatly increased as well as the public's awareness of it. Indeed, it is only because of the public's increased awareness of and increased protestation against environmental destruction that initial safeguard, have been instituted and the beginnings of progress on some environmental fronts have been made. But unless these efforts are strengthened and rapidly expanded on a global scale, the consequences for our beautiful and sacred planet are dire indeed.

For us to see what has gone so drastically awry, we need to bring to mind humanity's earlier relationship with the environment. Every religious tradition on the face of the planet has a long history of honoring the earth, and this history is as ancient as humanity's own existence. From the Inuit Tribes in the furthest reaches of the north to the African bushmen of the south; from Vedic sages of India to the Taoist Masters of China; from Christian Mystics of medieval Europe to the Native American Tribes—every spiritual tradition has as part of its legacy a profound reverence for the earth. Reverence for the earth cuts across national, cultural, racial and religious boundaries: it is as basic to humankind as loving one's mother.

It is significant that Hinduism, more than any other religion on the planet, emphasizes the unity of all existence. To see unity in diversity is, in the Hindu tradition, true vision. It is equally significant that Hinduism has traditionally regarded nature as a manifestation of Brahman, the divine all-pervading existence, which is both immanent and transcendent. As the ground of the universe, Brahman pervades the universe; Brahman is in everything, and everything is in Brahman. Brahman is the source of the universe; the universe rests in Brahman, and the universe eventually devolves into Brahman again. Everything that we see, feel and experience is therefore charged with the presence of the divine. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-Gita says, "My energy

enters the earth, sustaining all that lives: I become the moon, giver of water and sap, to feed the plants and the trees."[5]

The ancient ṛṣis repeatedly said that the universe is nothing *but* Brahman; divinity lies at the very core of its being. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad says:

Creating all things, Brahman entered into everything. Entering into all things, he became that which has shape and that which is shapeless; he became that which can be defined and that which cannot be defined...[6]

Continuing in this vein, in one of the most glorious declarations in the Upaniṣads, the Taittirīya declares: "It is He who is spread through and through in creation as unbroken joy."[7]

Hinduism has always held a deeply rooted conviction in the sanctity of nature and the interconnectedness of life. In an extraordinarily beautiful passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the earth is seen as a living, responsive being:

This Earth is like honey for all beings, and all beings are like honey for this earth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul in each; he is indeed the Self in all. He is all.[8]

Thus the Earth and all her creatures have a loving, reciprocal relationship that is based on unity. At this point in human history, humanity didn't see itself as divorced from its surroundings. On the contrary, we understood that the earth was our mother and like all loving and nurturing mothers, she was to be treated with love, gratitude and respect. The earth took care of us and we, too, took care of her.

While the Vedic sages vividly experienced the sacred reality of the environment in which they lived, even those who didn't have this divine vision as their daily reality, nevertheless had the deep understanding that the earth and nature's processes were

sacred, not to be taken for granted, and certainly not to be trifled with. The universe and all its myriad processes were nestled into the sacred framework of *ṛta,* the eternal and all encompassing law of harmony and balance. *Ṛta* is the universal, unchanging moral order envisioned as the essential pattern for all existence, macrocosm as well as microcosm. Through the divine harmony inherent in *ṛta*, all individual parts of the infinite Universe are bound into a harmonious whole. Everything relates to everything else, everything is bound to everything else; everything is necessary for everything else.

*Ṛta* is the foundation, support and essence of all that exists; *ṛta* is the highest reality as well as truth Absolute. *Ṛta* is not an abstract concept, as renowned Vedic scholar Patrick Olivelle astutely observed, but "an active realization of the truth. This active and creative aspect of truth underlies and brings about the cosmic order and harmony."[9] The dawn appears because of *ṛta*; the sun takes its course because of *ṛta*.[10] The motion of the planets, the seasons, the ebb and flow of the ocean, the process of birth, growth, decay and death in all living being—is all encompassed in *ṛta*. In human society *ṛta* manifests as *dharma*, the moral order, the law of righteous living, which governs and supports human life and society. This is also a part of *ṛta*, and *ṛta*—this great overarching cosmic order—is all a manifestation of Brahman.

As we move past Vedic times in India, the relationship between the earth and her inhabitants retained its sacred character. The ancient Indian law giver Manu said that trees and plants were full of consciousness and they experienced pleasure and pain. The *Laws of Manu* and other ancient Hindu scriptures were astonishingly prophetic in their approach to the environment. A person could be punished by loss of caste if she or he injured living plants, or cut down green trees for firewood,

or if the person mined or did mechanical engineering which damaged the environment.

It was only with the European Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century and the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, that humankind's relationship with the earth began to go seriously off its sacred course. To the Protestant mind, the idea of God's presence pervading the natural world was a hideous form of paganism: transferring God's glory to his creation was idolatry. In the Reformation's attempt to purify Christianity, they removed the sacred element from nature by separating creation from its spiritual source.

The Protestant Reformation perfectly dove tailed with the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution that introduced a mechanistic view of the universe. Galileo, Newton, Bacon, Descartes and others saw the universe as a perfect machine, humming along as orderly and efficiently as a Swiss clock. The creator of this perfect clock was a coolly detached, rational deity who looked down at his productive machine from his distant heaven. He didn't get his hands dirty by involving himself in the earth's processes.

Since the universe was a perfect machine, the natural world began to be seen as only a lifeless component of that great, whirring machine. Both animals and plants were seen as inanimate objects. Some of Descartes' followers went so far as to assert that animals felt no pain. These men said that just as a pipe-organ felt no pain when its keys were played, so the cry of a beaten dog did not indicate suffering. It was an automatic, mechanical response to stimuli.

Ironically, this view of God and his perfectly precision universe soon made God dispensable. The mechanical universe moved along fine without God. By the eighteenth century, God was disappearing from the scientifically accepted worldview.

With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in the nineteenth century, the schism between science and religion became complete. Science was alienated from religion, and humankind was alienated from God and nature. Earth was seen as a mass of lifeless matter, revolving in space without a purpose. Nature's only value was that it was the fuel for the industrial revolution.

During the nineteenth century, industrialization and industrial pollution became part of civilization. This way of life was soon exported by the industrializing nations to the third-world nations they colonized; even after the conquering nations retreated, they left behind the legacy of "progress" at the expense of human and environmental well-being. Western education persuaded many colonized nations that humanity's advancement could be achieved only by treating nature as an endless storehouse of disposable materials or as a sink in which to dump toxic effluence.

Manu said that trees and plants were full of consciousness, but as William Blake once shrewdly observed, "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way." Yet the loss of forest cover isn't just a question of aesthetics—it's planetary survival. Trees and plants give us oxygen: to destroy a forest is to affect the entire global environment. If we get rid of a forest in one part of the globe, the entire planet suffers.

The destruction of the rainforest is one of the worst calamities that our planet faces. The rainforest is the richest ecosystem on the earth. According to the World Resources Institute, between 1960 and 1990, 1.1 billion acres of tropical forest were cleared. Brazil lost 91.4 million acres of tropical forest in years of 1980-1990; Asia lost almost a third of its tropical forest cover in between of 1960-1980, which is the highest rate of

forest conversion in the world. Almost 90% of West Africa's rainforest has already been destroyed.[11]

While rainforests occupy a scant 2% of the planet's surface, they nevertheless provide over *one half* the earth's animal and plant species. Of course, most of these species aren't cute and cuddly. When we think of the rainforest, we think of creepy, crawly things; most of us think that if the world is missing a few bats, snakes, lizards, and toadstools, we'll still have a fine planet to live on.

But as the *ṛṣis* saw thousands of years ago, everything in this universe is deeply interconnected and interrelated. The great English poet and mystic John Donne wrote in the seventeenth century, "No man is an island"; today he might expand his poem by adding that humanity itself is not an island. We are all part of one large whole; we are all one, nested in unity with the rest of the universe. We are all manifestations of the one Brahman, and through *that* divine Reality we are all connected to one another.

Sri Ramakrishna often said that it is God alone who has become all living beings. Once he ran to a meadow to see how living beings were sustained. He was thrilled to see ants crawling in the meadow. If you or I look at the same scene, we'd probably just see a bunch of bugs. But for Sri Ramakrishna, it was a divine sight. When he later talked about his experience he said, "It appeared to me that every place was filled with Consciousness." Every aspect of our planet is the presence of the Divine, just as the *ṛṣis* realized it thousands of years ago. Nothing is exempt, nothing is expendable.

Even on a pragmatic level, before we think that the earth can do just as well without so many snakes, bats and toadstools located in those faraway rain forests, we should bear in mind that we may be staring into the jaws of our own destruction. Fully one quarter of all our medicines have their origin in the rainforest.

Approximately 70% of the plants designated by the National Cancer Institute as being useful in cancer therapy are found *only* in rainforests. Who knows if the rainforest has a cure for AIDS or some other deadly disease that we don't even know about yet? So let's not think in terms of lizards, bats and toadstools: we are *all* a part of the rainforest. As Swami Vivekananda said: It is our own attitude which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful; our thoughts make things ugly. . . . believe in this world—that there is meaning behind everything. Everything in the world is good, is holy and beautiful.[12]

This is the situation we face today: the earth has become an increasingly small planet where everyone's actions affect everyone else. Since the early twentieth century, the earth's mean surface temperature has increased by approximately 0.8 °C (1.4 °F), with about two-thirds of the increase occurring since 1980.[13] Scientists today assert that global warming is primarily caused by an accumulation of greenhouse gasses, produced by deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels. Global warming, in practical terms, means more extreme weather patterns. Anyone who has lived on the planet the past few years can attest to this trend worldwide: there has been an increasing number of deadly cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, droughts, floods. Global warming also means a rise in sea levels and changes in precipitation patterns, which will probably result in an increase in sub-tropical desertification.

Global warming has reached a critical level and, tragically, those who suffer its worst effects are those living in third-world countries. The brutal truth is that those who have contributed the least to global warming are the very ones who must suffer its worst effects. According to a 2012 report in *US News and World Report*: "A report commissioned by the governments of more than 20 countries found that more than 100 million people

will die as a result of climate change by 2030 if the world stays on its current path." Shockingly, the report concluded: "Third-world countries are likely to remain the worst hit, as they will be forced to use already limited resources to fight disease and drought. More than 90 percent of deaths caused by climate change are expected to be in third-world countries."[14]

That sickening forecast not withstanding now would nevertheless find a threat to global unity in our response to the worldwide ecological crisis. Many people in first-world nations refuse to accept the reality of global warming. Like ostriches who bury their heads in the sand at the approach of danger—if we can't see it, it doesn't exist—many in first-world nations stubbornly deny the reality of global warming because they have no desire to change their comfortable way of life. They don't want to get a smaller car with better mileage; they don't want to take public transportation, they don't want to bother to recycle their garbage; they don't want to turn down their thermostat or avoid buying wood harvested from tropical rain forests. They don't want to give up eating their McDonald's hamburgers, even though South American rainforests are being razed to feed the more affluent nations' insatiable appetite for beef, largely in the form of the omnipresent hamburger. The cattle from Brazil appear on American, Canadian, Japanese, and European tables.

The other threat to global unity in responding to the global ecological crisis comes from third-world countries, whose rapid industrialization has been achieved without regard to the ravaging of the soil, water or air. While first-world countries need to restrain their rapaciousness, can anyone suggest that third-world countries restrain their advancement? No one can. Every person in every land deserves adequate food, shelter and personal safety. Every person in every land should enjoy the same high standards of health, hygiene, and education that those in first-

world countries enjoy. That said, third-world countries, in order to ensure their own survival, will have to make stringent efforts to insure that environmental degradation and burning of fossil fuels be drastically curtailed. The citizens of these countries will have to do everything in their power to hold those in power accountable for their actions. Unfortunately, many in power have lined their own pockets by kowtowing to major industrial polluters. While they have accrued wealth, their own country men suffer the brunt of their corruption and, unfortunately, will suffer even more in the future.

In order to retrieve our earlier relationship with the earth, one that reflects the oneness of existence taught by Vedanta, we will need to regain the holistic vision of the ancient *ṛṣis*. This is where Swami Vivekananda's role is potentially immense, for Swami Vivekananda was born to take the message of the Vedas—whose holistic wisdom had for millenniums been locked up and reserved for the elite—and broadcast it over the world, making it available for all humanity. "It is only the pure Upaniṣadic religion," Vivekananda declared, "that I have gone about preaching in the world."[15] Again, to Sister Nivedita he said: "I preach only the Upaniṣads. If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upaniṣads.[16] Emphasizing the need to spread the truth of the unity of existence to the entire world, Vivekananda said upon his return to India from the West: Work out the salvation of this land and of the whole world ... Carry the light and the life of the Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity that is hidden within every soul.[17]

It is no accident that Vivekananda's lectures on the Isa Upanishad were entitled "Practical Vedanta." And how does this Upaniṣad begin? *īśā vāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat*: "Know that whatever exists in this changing universe is covered with God." The practical application of this highest flight of Vedanta is that, as Vivekananda explains: "We have to cover

everything with the Lord Himself ... by really seeing God in everything. . . . The whole world is full of the Lord."[18]

This is the highest truth of the Upanishads and this message has the potential to shake humanity from its selfish slumber. Because, when all is said and done, selfishness is the root cause of our current environmental crisis. The "practical Vedanta" of the Isa Upanishad addresses this very topic in its first verse: *"tena tyaktena bhuñjitha, ma gṛdhaḥ kasyasiddhanam"*: "Therefore protect yourself through detachment. Do not covet anyone's wealth." Protecting ourselves through renunciation is to learn, as Vivekananda said, "that the whole of life is giving; that nature will force you to give. So, give willingly. Sooner or later you will have to give up. You come into life to accumulate. With clenched fist you want to take. But nature puts a hand on your throat and makes your hands open."[19] Coveting the wealth of others in the global context is to mean taking more than one's fair share of the earth's resources. As Mahatma Gandhi once said: There is enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed.

The ecological crisis humanity faces today is the result of a spiritual crisis. The real environmental degradation we face is not to be found in toxic chemicals or even in evil multinational corporations or corrupt politicians. The root of our ecological disaster is the greed and selfishness lying in the human heart. Unless some way is found to address this fundamental problem, we will have little success in dealing with its consequences. The only way to remove greed and selfishness is taken to heart, is Swami Vivekananda's message of unity. He said:

When I say I am separate from you it is a lie, a terrible lie. I am one with the universe. . . . I am one with the air that surrounds me, one with heat, one with light, eternally one with the whole Universal Being, who is called this universe, who is mistaken for this universe, for it is He and nothing else. . . . I am one with That.[20]

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# Carving Out a Space: Women and Social Movement Politics in India

Rajasri Basu

## I

Broadly speaking, social movement may be defined as a collective enterprise to bring about a new order of life. It is a conscious, organized attempt on the part of people to resist the unacceptable and to bring about changes in the system, which normally the political parties are unable to do or at times, are not interested to do. The distinctive part of social movements is that they mostly consist of ordinary people who become disgruntled with the indifferent or lackadaisical approach of the system and protest against the issues which they dislike. The issues may be diverse, very broad and generalized type like peace movement and anti-war protest to specific and categorical like lowering the age to denote juvenility. Social movements have played a very major role during the last decade of the 20th century in overthrowing authoritarian regimes in many of the East European countries and of late from 2010 onwards are very much active in the Arab world or in some North African countries in bringing about democracy. On all the occasions, the movements deepen democracy bringing out in the process, more space for people in the system of governance.

Thus social movements do not remain and/or confine themselves to the domain of struggle and protest but bring about a qualitative change in the nature of democracy, make it more participatory reflecting the desires of the people, more egalitarian

and providing more voice and space to the general mass. Social movements, although a group activity have been able to entrench each individual's freedom, equality and rights in a unique way. Therein lies the politics of social movements because they have been mostly launched by common people who are largely a-political, in the sense that they do not get engaged in the nitty-gritty of party politics. The apparently non-partisan, a-political people, however, transform the political scenario and challenge the very conventional corridors of power.

Incidentally, there have been huge literature on social movements and in that context, it may be put forward that scholars of social movements have identified several conceptual "turns" in social movement theories (Goodwin and Jasper : 2009). First is the economic turn. There have been two dimensions to this turn. One was from Mancur Olson, who considered individuals as purely rational animals. Individuals after weighing costs and benefits of their choices could engage themselves in protests, if those appear unfavourable to them. The real significance of this argument lies perhaps not so much in the overtly economic consideration but on the admission that 'rational' individuals can also take part on protests. The second dimension comes from McCarthy and Zald, who theorised on what they call Social Movement Organizations, which formed the core of the social movements but act like firms in the sense that they try to accumulate resources, hire staff whose interests might diverge from constituents and sell their products to potential contributors. (McCurthy and Zald: 2001)

Second is the political turn, in which the focus is on the demand of rights, mostly civil and political and the state is the target. As in the economic model, the protestors are seen as rational people who are interested in pursuing their interests as

best as they could. Besides, by highlighting the interaction between the movements and the state this line of arguments highlight the conflict and the external environments of the movements.

Third is the cultural turn, which began to arise in the 1980s, where consciously created cultural symbols have been used to convince people. Symbols have often been used in generating religious sentiments and emotions amongst people in order to create solidarity. The symbol of the birthplace of Lord Rama (*Rama-janmabhoomi*) was used in India in early 1990s to mobilize the devout Hindus, which ultimately was turned into a political mobilization and the opportunity was grabbed by the pro-Hindu political party Bharatiya Janata Party.

Recently, it has been found that cutting across boundaries many issues have been raised which are receiving attention of the protesters. For instance, environmental movements, peace movements for women's rights and their security are issues which are not confined to any particular country or state. These, although are very recent additions in terms of chronology, are actually issues which defy both space and time, as they are happening in every state and at all times. So the theoretical model explaining these movements should also be such yet most of the social movement models are assuming national movement model interacting with a single state.

In the context of the different "turns" that could be found in a chronological order in social movements, it can, however, besaid now that the different components are mostly juxtaposed and are difficult to isolate. It has been noticed in the recent India against Corruption Movement that symbols of organized power, like the Union Parliament have been targeted for not doing anything for arresting corruption and in the process protesters converge to demand an effective office called "lokpal", which again needs a

will on the part of parliamentarians. Thus a social movement erupted to moot out a social evil, which again is not a single-state-syndrome, requiring a political task on the part of political parties. Incidentally, the ramifications of corruption also fall on the body-economy of the country and thus, economy, polity, society and culture become tied in the context of this movement.

In the sections following, the paper focuses upon the budding, grafting and flowering of social movements in India, which are basically people's initiatives and arose from time to time, with a special focus on the role and participation of women on the one hand and bringing out women-specific issues like violence against women, freedom of the women in choosing life partner etc, on the other. Most of these movements grow up spontaneously as a reaction to some incidents and saw participation of all people cutting across party affiliation, gender, class etc. Thus many of these movements, not only saw participation of women in large numbers but also bring out those issues which are integrally related to basic human values like liberty and equality but which unfortunately are not enjoyed by the women of this country. 'Women' become both the subject and the object of these movements, blurring the conventional line of demarcation between the two. These movements, through their very non-party nature challenge not only the incumbents of power but also the very traditional and orthodox corridor of power. The paper will also look into the 'space' and the 'voice' that the women of India have acquired in the process, which again, appears to be a tool of achieving the goal of gender-equality in the country.It will also be the endeavour of the paper to try to provide a new way of looking into the women's movements of India and to give a new theoretical underpinning to it. It is to be noted, however that only very recent social movements of India will form the backdrop of this discussion.

## II

The first incident that will be considered for discussion is the case of Rizwanur Rahman, which created a furore in Kolkata and saw, perhaps for the first time in this city a spontaneous movement by common people—which was non-violent and in which large number of young girls participated to express their anger and discontent. The incident happened in August-September, 2007 whose beginning may remind us of a Mills and Boon love story where a young Hindu girl of 23—the *princess* of a yearly 200 crore turn-over-empire fell in love and then subsequently got married to a *prince charming* – well educated but of a poor lower middle class Muslim family. Initially, the marriage was kept secret but after it became known to the family of Rizwanur, the groom, they decided to bring the bride in their home seeking simultaneously police protection as they apprehended that the influential industrial family could try to separate them. The news of the marriage infuriated the bride's family and all sorts of external interferences into the marriage of two adult persons could be noticed.

The top brass of a government structure—the Kolkata Police appeared to be the villain of the game, when they not only used the traditional weapons of force to dissociate the couple but also openly acted as moral guardians after the death of Rizwanur. Rizwanur's body was found lying beside a railway line at Dum Dum, his hands folded over his chest and a deep wound on the back of his head. The then Police Commissioner in a press conference told that Rizwanur's death was a simple case of suicide, even before the mandatory routine post mortem of the body was done. Taking the mantle of moral guardianship in own hands, he also said that cases of eloping, even of adults are morally unacceptable. Without going into the details of further probing, which brought about several uncomfortable acts on the

part of police and the subsequent suspension and transfers of certain high profile police officers, it would have been better if we now turn our attention to people's spontaneous outbursts and protests which the City saw for the first time perhaps in this manner.

After a week of Rizwanur's death on September 21, 2007, a few people on September 28 held a candle-light vigil in memory of RizwanurRahman, by placing one of his photographs on the pavement in front of Kolkata's St Xavier's College which later turned into a shining epicentre of an astonishing outpouring of mass outrage. The vinyl posters strung out on the college railings saw cramming with thousands of signatures; the condolence books burst with countless messages of support. Hundreds of people — from 80-year-olds to little boys and girls — come here every day to light a candle or scrawl their names. They all want justice for Rizwanur. They are all raising their voice against the way the rich and the powerful sought to cut him down.

The movement was considered to be a milestone in the country's contours of protests and movements as it witnessed solemnity amongst protesters in place of lowliness; determination in their eyes rather than hesitation; anger in their manner instead of meekness. They expressed their solidarity to the cause of justice, to the freedom of every adult individual to choose his/her partner; and they decried the overpowering state which tried to grab the individual in its totality not leaving an inch of space to him/her. The protest also involved two dimensions—one is the participation of a large number of women of varying age-groups and the other is the very positive and active role played by the media.

The second incident taken up for discussion is that of July 9. 2012 evening, when in the busy Guwahati-Shillong road in the heart of Guwahati – the gateway to Northeast India, a girl was

chased, beaten, molested and traumatised — when she was coming out of a club-cum-bar by a group of 20 odd strong mob in full public view with TV news channels recording the brutal act on tape.The incident was not only terrifying, questioning the safety, security and rights of women but also brutal, in the sense that one of the TV journalists along with his crew was filming this incident without coming to the rescue of the girl—— who is incidentally a minor or without informing the police, which he could have easily done. Besides, Guwahati is thought to be a highly fortified city since it has seen many terror attacks and bomb blasts. But even the governance of that fortified city failed to ensure the safety of girls in busy evening. Eventually, after almost half an hour, MukulKalita, another journalist from a local daily intervened and rescued the girl. The case caused uproar in the national and local media right after the video was aired by the TV News Channel and going viral on YouTube, provoking debates about the safety of women and human rights in India. (Chatterjee: 2012) Activists, students, journalists and politicians across the nation went berserk on social media, Facebooking and tweeting outrageously.

The police inaction could be seen as they allegedly failed to come to the rescue of the girl on time—although the local police station was barely a kilometre away from the incident, nor was, able to arrest a single accused before 48 hours in spite of the clear identification in the video-footage. The anger of the common people was evident as it was they who put up a large hoarding with the photographs of six principal accused condemning them as 'shames' of the Assamese society. Sixteen accused were arrested including the TV journalist and his crew, although the Court in its verdict convicted eleven of them, acquitting the others including the journalist.

The nation-wide uproar and that of Assam, in particular, questioned the very credibility of governance, expressed its

horror on the sheer degradation of human morality, and questions have been raised on the role played by police and media with respect to curbing violence *per se* and against women, in particular. Protesters have advanced different suggestions from castration, maiming and blinding the perpetrators to curb such gross violation of human rights, women's rights and child rights. Questions have also been raised on media ethics and although it is true that the video footage helps in identifying the culprits, people are asking the question whether it was essential to telecast the footage or to upload that in You Tube.

The third incident is a very recent one— that of the horrifying incident of a gang rape, torture and committing grave physical injury to a woman of 23 years in a moving public bus in the capital of the country. In spite of tremendous mental strength of the girl, she succumbed to the ghastly injuries that she suffered in Mount Elizabeth Hospital of Singapore, where she was transported later. The incident sparked off massive protest, first at *India Gate* and *Raisina Hills* and then at *Jantar Mantar* in Delhi, where thousands of protesters – mostly college students joined to condemn the ghastly incident and to demand a society where women can live without fear and violence. The movement gradually spread to other parts of the country and Kolkata also witnessed peaceful, silent candle-lit processions. Protests have occurred online as well on the social networking sites Facebook and WhatsApp, with users replacing their profile images with a black dot symbol. Tens of thousands have signed an online petition protesting the incident (Times: 2012). After the woman's death on 29 December, protests were staged all over India, including Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, and Visakhapatnam. Many of the mourners carried candles, wore black dress and some pasted black cloth across their mouths. (The Economic Times:

2012)Since her death, the unprecedented protests against rape have continued across India and have motivated the media and police to focus on the rising incidents of rape and sexual harassment in the country. Sexual assaults have made headline news almost daily, a big change from the time when such cases were mentioned only briefly and were rarely reported by television news channels.

Although the incidents are different in many dimensions, the huge protests leading to some major consequences at the level of governance underline the success of these kinds of protests. A similar kind of incident occurred in Pakistan in June 2002. Although the trajectory of the events is different in the Pakistani case, but the protests and a change in the attitude of governance of that country is something that cannot be overlooked. In case of Pakistan, it was the fate of Mukhtar Mai, a woman from the village of Meerwala, in the rural county of Jatoi of Muzaffargarh. In June 2002, MukhtârMâi was the survivor of a gang rape, which was a normal consequence there of honour revenge, on the orders of a tribal council of the local Mastoi Balochclan that was richer and more powerful as opposed to her Tatla clan in that region. (Ahmed :2007) Although custom would expect her to commit suicide after being raped,(Mai : 2006). Mukhtarandid not do that and on the contrary, spoke up, and pursued the case. In the following days, the story became headline news in Pakistan, and remained so for months. By 3 July, the BBC had picked up on the story, Time Magazine ran a story on the case in mid-July. Major international newspapers and networks reported on developments in the case.Mukhtaran began to receive awards for bravery and courage since August, 2005 from her own country as well as from other nations. Her memoir—first published in French soon became one of the best-sellers and was translated in to 23 languages; her life became the subject of

fictions, plays, documentaries as well as for academic pursuits. She, herself became one of the laudable voices of women's rights through the organization called *Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization* and remains a pivot for changing rape laws moving them from religious law to penal code, effectively separating rape from adultery.

## III

All the incidents mentioned above hover around the issues of women's rights, women's voice and space in the society at large. In the case of Rizwanur Rahman, the victim was a male member of the society ; but the issue involved remains whether a woman can go to the extent of choosing her partner to the detriment of her parental family. The issue also involves inequalities in terms of economic class, social status and religious differences. What makes the incident glaringly ghastly is that it has happened in an urban, metropolitan setting, which inculcates and promotes individualistic culture and preferences. The individuals, in question, were educated, modern man and woman, who loved and liked each other for their personal traits. Amidst these apparently modern, secular, non-ethnocentric, cross-cultural, KFCised Kolkata, not only the family is prepared to give any space and voice to a woman but shamefully, the democratic system of governance, in a most undemocratic way, tries to grab an individual's personal life, whatever little they have. Like most of the cities of India, Kolkata also experienced the impact of globalization and free-market economy since the middle of 1990s. The shining shopping malls, the international brands, the multiplexes, the flyovers have become the face of the city. The Redfieldian (Redfield:1941) vices are also gradually gripping the city. But amidst these, the medievalian control of the family, community and state disturbs all modern citizens. This is also in

case of the incident of Pakistan that has been mentioned here, but with the difference that while in case of Kolkata, the incident itself creates a furore, in the Pakistani case, the victim turns into a real victor, which draws the attention of all.

However, in both the cases, women have come forward in voicing their grievances against killing of individual freedom by the conglomerate—whether it is the family or the community or the clan or the state. The nature of protest, which Kolkata witnessed after the infamous Rizwanur case, has again some prominent similarities with the protest that Delhi witnessed recently. In both these protests, large number of young girls (along with young boys) participated, most of whom are college-goers and most of whom abhor politics. Their reaction was thus spontaneous and emerges out of their conscience which dictates them to raise their voice against gross violation and neglect of women's rights. Their absolutely non-violent protest with candles in memory of the deceased in both the cases and their urge to remain so in face of provocation remind everyone of the Gandhian movement in the nationalist era.

The incidents of Guwahati and Delhi were able to ignite the young minds and saw their umpteen faces in the protest out of perhaps, some kind of fear-psychosis. All the women of India—whether young or old have received a big jolt and have realised the insecure position and milieu in which they are in. The slogan of 'universal sisterhood', coined during the second wave of American feminist movement (Eagleton : 2003)and rejected later on the ground of women's plurality suddenly becomes meaningful and grand-mothers, mothers, aunts, sisters daughters and daughters-in-law are thinking not only about their security but also sensitize each other about the situation, about how to combat in face of an eventuality and how to become victors from the society inflicted victimization.

Two major issues evolve out of these recent Indian protests. First were a total apathy, disdain and loathsome treatment by the young people of India toward political parties. It becomes quite evident from their grit and determination, that they have understood that political parties engage only in political bickeringand now it is the people's claim to demand a violence free society which the people in power should address and respond by making appropriate laws. The Kolkata incident brought to the fore the ugly connection between the political boss and the economic leaders, the liaison between the political executive and the permanent executive, the grabbing of power of all institutions including as innocuous as sport bodies by a coterie, the desire of the powerful to exert over the powerless and to minimise the democratic space as much as one can. Even such a powerful clique had to bend to the commoners' demands and the powerful Commissioner of Police of Kolkata and two Deputy Commissioners were transferred. The Delhi protest highlighting upon gender justice saw the appointment of a Commission under a retired Judge, who was a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India and a former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission. The Commission was set up by the government in the face of the massive unrest to change the rape laws and the Commission was asked specifically to look into the matter of more stringent rape laws in order to bring about gender justice. So the power of the people became visible, which became more as the Commission asked the people, organizations and all bodies to give suggestions to the Commission. In fact, as many as 8,000 suggestions were received by the Commission, and the Commission submitted its recommendation within one-month.

In the incident of Pakistan too, in spite of all kinds of threats that Mukhtar Mai received, including that from political parties

and leaders to withdraw her case against the accused rapist, there is a silver lining that the lower house of Pakistan's lower court modifies the rape law which requires the victim to produce for witnesses in favour of her allegation. There is also a change so that now the forensic and circumstantial evidences may also be used for investigation. Besides, a bill called Protection of Women's Bill was signed by the Pakistani President in 2006. Although, these measures in no way can secure women's position there, still it can be regarded as a small step forward amidst tremendous adversaries.

The second issue is with respect to the role of the media. There is no doubt that electronic and print media have played a very positive and pro-active role in all the incidents. The minute-to-minute coverage in the Television, the reporting of news in newspapers, the discussions and arguments have in a great way not only made the common people aware but sensitised them and also enthused them to come out and to take part in protests. In fact, all these movements, to a large extent, even rely on the mass media for mobilization of public support, legitimization in the mainstream discourse and for broadening social conflicts. (Gamson and Wolfsfeld: 1993)The national English news channels — Times Now, NDTV, CNN-IBN, Headlines Today as well as the national Hindi news channels—AajTak, IBN7, Zee News not only played a positive role in so far as these movements are concerned but almost took up advocacy when the panel discussions discussed several suggestions and also invited viewers to present their viewpoints and recommendations with respect to the tightening of laws. In case of the Rizwanur incident, the vernacular news channels of Kolkata did play a very positive role. This is a major triumph of Indian democracy, which in spite of guaranteeing freedom of the press through Article 19 of the Constitution(Basu:1982), remained hopelessly under the

state-controlled DooraDarshan channels for so many years. The real pro-democratic and catalytic role of the media in sustaining and ultimately pressurising the Government —Union or State— to the demands of the people is a sure sign of mature and entrenched democracy, which elections alone can never guarantee.

Two related points may be mentioned here. One is another incident of Kolkata which happened on February 5, 2012, where a woman—a mother of two was gang raped in a moving vehicle. This incident, which is referred to as Park Street rape case in common parlance, in fact came to the knowledge of the people, because of the Bengali news channels. However, unlike the Rizwanur case of Kolkata or the more recent Delhi gang rape case, the incident in spite of the media coverage did not lead to any protests and outbursts from the common people. Perhaps, that is the reason, why people in power have first did not pay any heed to the incident, raised questions about the character of the victim and even now, the charge sheet framed by the prosecution is so inappropriate that the Court has slapped a fine on the prosecution for presenting such a charge sheet, where it had copied verbatim documents purportedly provided by the accused and filed them as a part of prosecution papers opposing bail for the same accused. The incident happened at a time when euphoria about a new government in West Bengal did not die down, and perhaps that was a reason why in spite of unpalatable statements by the Chief minister of the State, or many of her colleagues in the Cabinet did not lead to any real protests even my the Women's groups.

The second is that sometimes the media and more often it is the local mediacross the line of journalism and enter the private space of the individual. It is out of the quest of finding out the persons, who are entering the bars that the journalist at Guwahati

filmed the incident of molestation instead of informing the police. This is not only intruding into the private space of an individual, but also doing the round of moral policing. Thus, not only the journalistic ethics and media ethics have been violated but while acting as a moral police, the journalist himself has acted immorally. It is also to be noted that moral policing is done always for the women. That is why, a minister of Madhya Pradesh, who has been appointed as such after taking oath pledging commitment to the Constitution of India can go unscathed and can remain in that position even after making a comment to the effect that women must not cross the *Lakshmanrekha* to avoid unwanted consequences. (The Hindu: 2013). The deeply-rooted patriarchal mind-set, culture and values are difficult to get erased.

## IV

While the nation is hotly debating on why so many incidents of violence across the length and breadth of the country are happening against women, there is unfortunately, no abatement to these crimes. Every day rape, molestation and sexual assault of women are making headlines in newspapers. The Gender Inequality Index ranks India at 129th only ahead of Afghanistan in the South Asian region. (UNDP: 2013) This measurement, it may be mentioned, does not consider violence against women as an index and captures the loss of achievement, within a country, due to gender inequality.National Crime Record Bureau statistics show crimes against women increased by 7.1 % nationwide since 2010. There has been a rise in the number of incidents of rape recorded too. In 2011, 24,206 incidents were recorded, a rise of 9% from the previous year. More than half of the victims are between 18 and 30 years of age. (NCB :2013)

Amongst the many reasons that are being put forward for increasing violence against women, one is a relatively weak law

regarding punishing the rapists. It is heartening to see that the protests throughout the country following the Delhi incident did not go in vain. The Justice Verma Committee, which the Union Government was almost force to appoint to look into the rape laws and to suggest measures, recommended a range of amendments to the existing laws, suggest new sections, develop new protocol and pronounce a new bill of rights for women. The report re-defines also rape on a sociologically informed classification, retaining gender specificity for perpetrators (always men) and gender plurality for victims (anybody irrespective of gender or sexual orientation). In case of gang rape, the report rightly recognises that anybody including women can commit or abet gang rape. For the first time in the history of law reform in India, the Committee has recommended that consent should not be presumed in the event of an existing marital relationship between the complainant and the accused. The report foregrounds institutionalised forms of rape culture in juvenile, observation and protection homes to illustrate their terrifying relationship with law and governance. The way Justice Verma while briefing the report applauded people and especially women who have ventured to take part in protest demanding stricter laws and punitive measures for rape accused show that a real second wave women's movement has taken place in India after women's demands during 1970s.

In the end, a few words about 'new social movement' and 'civil society' may not be out of place here. These two words have become almost buzz words in the vocabulary of social science literature today. The apparently non-political, people's protests for primary issues like women's movements have been dubbed mostly in social science literature as 'new social movement' or 'civil society movement'. However, many Indian social scientists are not very happy about the words and consider

them to be inherently 'Western'. For instance, Dhanagare and John (Omvedt: 1993), argue that new social movements hinging upon non-economic issues may have been successful in the advanced industrialised countries of the West, but for a country like India discussion about new social movements gives a false impression that the old, economic demands have already been satisfactorily met in India and hence people are getting involved in new non-economic issues. They also point out that the emphasis on the non-political aspect of new social movements is a theoretical ploy to take away political consciousness from the exploited masses and bestow upon them an apolitical force of morality and social power. However, the so-called new social movements like environmental movements, women's movements, peace movements are also harping on economic matters like subsistence, displacement, homelessness, inequality, and the social issues only add a new dimension to it. Similarly, Partha Chatterjee(2001) in his very well-known and oft-quoted essay has criticised the notion of civil society and instead urges to use the term political society after scrutinizing civil society minutely and rejecting it for its inherent inapplicability in India.

Without going into the very intricate theoretical debates associated with the terms like 'new social movement' and 'civil society', it may, however, be said that many of the people of this country—young, women and urbanites in particular, become totally disgruntled and disgusted with the party politics that inform parliamentary-representative democracy in India. At the same time, they do not jump in to a marxist or socialist revolution — as many of their predecessors did in 1970s to bring about a total transformation in the system of governance, as the totalitarian experience of the socialist regimes looms large in the back of the mind. In such a situation, the spontaneous outburst of anger, humiliation, fear, insecurity, and powerlessness drove them to

stage protests cutting across their personal political leanings and orientations. The rare *camaraderie* that was seen in these protests grew out of a common psyche, which was heavily bruised and shaken by the almost daily and routine misbehaviour meted out to the women of this country in home and household, in college and workplace, in lanes and bye-lanes—everywhere at every age, at every community.

The slow but sure inching and grabbing of the public space by the women of India has made a total churning of the Indian society, which is highly male-oriented, patriarchically tilted and skewed in favour of men. Time has come for a review of the Indian feminist studies also, which continuously harp on two issues: one, the plurality of Indian women and two, that the state of women in India cannot be interpreted in light of a political power struggle, like in the west, but need to be accepted and dealt within a cultural context.There is no doubt, that the problems, position and situation of the Indian women is plural. The issue of plurality is not only true of Indian feminism but for feminism per se, which is why many are in favour of using the word 'feminisms' (Kemp: 1998). Still it is to be taken into consideration by Indian feminism that certain basic premises are there against which it has to wage its war. The patriarchal power structure informed by an irrational, misogynist hatred has to be accepted and contested. The daily fates of rape, sexual assault, molestation, dowry-related tortures and deaths experienced by most women of India should no longer be treated as fates but should be linked strongly to the culture of hatred toward women feminist movements should be directed against that. Then only perhaps the sliding male-female-ratio, the problem of female foeticide, and such grossly anti-women practices could be arrested which might lead to a lessening 'missing women syndrome.

In the same vein, many of the noted feminist scholars of India (Chitnis, Kishwar: 2005) argue that historically India has *always been a highly hierarchical society* with the hierarchies maintained through customs and social behavioral codes. Chitnis(2005)also notes that unlike the west where individuality and personal freedom are emphasized, Indians cherish values like submission to superiors, *self-denial*and*sublimating the individual ego.* In other words, Indian society is sociologically and psychologically acclimatized to the notion of a stratified social order, and what may appear as gender hierarchy to an outsider, is simply regarded as cultural observances by Indians. Also, what westerners may read as a forfeiting of the individual self is regarded by Indian women as a prioritizing of family and community over the individual. Hence they see it as making a choice in favor of the larger good.

This is a too culturally determined essentialist argument, which robs off the political component of women's movement making it toothless in the face of a hugely political society where women are routinely stripped of their voice, space and hence freedom. This culture worship by the Indian feminists is ruining the Indian women in the form of gender genocide (Banerji: 2012). Thus, neither is the new social movement nor is the civil society movement robbed of 'political' component. It is *apolitical* in the sense that it is non-partisan. The 'representative' character of democracy gets transformed into a more 'direct' form, where people truly participate in governance.

That is why, it has to be admitted that social movements have a politics of their own. The issues may be predominantly economic at one point of time, environmental or women-related at other, but these are not apolitical movements. On the contrary, the social movements are always political and it is the political dimension that the women's movements of South Asia have to

understand and capture. The post Delhi gang rape women's movements and protests capture that dimension sincerely which is why they become so significant in the Indian political cauldron.

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# Sixth Academic Session

# Swami Vivekananda and the Role of Intercultural Dialogue in Saving Our Human Heritage

Jeffery D. Long

## Introduction

The urgency of Swami Vivekananda's vision of intercultural and inter-religious harmony for the survival of the human species is greater now than ever. This essay will explore the details of this vision, particularly in regard to inter-religious dialogue, with a special concern to dispel widespread misconceptions about Swami Vivekananda's message. The critics of what some have called Swamiji's 'radical universalism' have, in many cases, misunderstood or distorted his religious pluralism as a teaching that "all religions are the same." They have then attacked this straw man position, which in fact bears little or no resemblance to Swamiji's actual teaching on this subject.

A closer and more careful reading and analysis of Swami Vivekananda's lectures and writings reveal that his views are actually far more nuanced than popular distortions would suggest. Rather than making the simplistic and false claim that "all religions are the same," Swamiji carves out a true middle path between the extremes of absolutism and relativism into which worldviews typically fall. His teaching of the harmony of religions involves a twofold assertion: first, that there are areas of commonality and overlap on a deep philosophical level which the world's religions share, and secondly, that beyond this common ground, there are also distinctive truths that each world religion offers humanity. These truths, despite being distinct and diverse,

are best seen not as contradictory, but as complementary. By revealing its subtlety, Swami Vivekananda's understanding of the world's religions as embodying diverse, but complementary, perspectives on our shared reality can be shown to have an even more profound relevance to humanity's contemporary situation than is generally known.

## The Impact of Swami Vivekananda's Teaching During the Last 150 Years

The impact of Swami Vivekananda upon humanity during the 150 years since his birth is almost impossible to evaluate. Swamiji's philosophy of religious pluralism, or, as it is also known, the harmony of religions, proclaimed in his first address to the Parliament of the World Religions in 1893, developed in his later lectures, and drawn from both the teaching and the example of his master, Sri Ramakrishna, energized the interfaith movement of his time. Through the influence of the Vedanta Society and the intellectuals who were drawn to it–figures like Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, and Huston Smith–this philosophy has shaped mainstream American views on religious diversity.

As I mentioned in a presentation that I gave last year on the occasion of the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, in a controversial 2009 *Newsweek* Editorial with the eye-catching title, "We Are All Hindus Now," Lisa Miller cites survey data indicating that 65 percent of Americans believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life." The same survey data tells us that 30 percent of Americans identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious," while 24 percent believe in reincarnation, or rebirth: a number which includes a surprising 37 percent of white evangelical Christians.[1] Other reputable polls yield comparable numbers in response to similar questions.

The teachings and the life of Sri Ramakrishna would very likely be unknown in the West, but for Swamiji's global travels.

Swamiji opened the floodgates, allowing a variety of Hindu spiritual teachers to come to the West, such as Paramahansa Yogananda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, among others. In addition to these teachers who visited the West, the overall atmosphere of acceptance of and interest in Hindu spiritual teaching that Swamiji helped to cultivate served to make available to Westerners the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo, who were both based in India, but who both nevertheless had large followings in the West.

This steady stream of spiritual teachers and teachings, in turn, has made a range of Hindu beliefs, practices, and imagery more available in North America than is otherwise conceivable. Thus, if one takes a stroll through a shopping mall and browses through the various stores, one increasingly finds clothing and home decorations adorned with images of Lord Ganesha and other Hindu deities. The greatest hit song by a member of the most popular rock band ever–"My Sweet Lord," by George Harrison, of the Beatles–includes the Hare Krishna mantra, and Mick Jagger's new group, Super Heavy, has had a recent hit with a song called *satyameva jayate.* Julia Roberts has "come out" as a Hindu, while other Western celebrities are drawn to both Hindu and Buddhist spiritual paths, wear *om* jewellery, and sport Sanskrit tattoos, as do growing numbers of young people (including a good many of my students).

How did all of this happen? How does a nation whose people overwhelmingly identify themselves as Christian, and where religion and religious affiliation continue to be hot-button political issues, reach a point where a majority of its people are willing to assent to the ancient Vedic claim that "Truth is one, though the wise speak of it in various ways"? How did nearly one in four Americans come to believe in karma and rebirth? How did

Hinduism become "cool"? Clearly, such a widespread cultural shift must have a complex variety of causes. No account of the gradual transformation of the American religious landscape would be complete, however, without some reference to the life and work of Swami Vivekananda.

In India, Swamiji's philosophy of selfless service has led to the emergence of the massive education and relief efforts of the Ramakrishna Mission. His impassioned and patriotic call to all Indians made a profound impression on the mind of Mahatma Gandhi and numerous other leaders across the spectrum of India's independence movement. In fact, the young Gandhi made an effort to see Swami Vivekananda during the meeting of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1902. Swamiji, however, was unfortunately on his death bed at the time, and was not able to receive visitors.

### Swami Vivekananda and the Interfaith Movement

It is probably with regard to the interfaith movement, however, that the vision of Swami Vivekananda has had its greatest impact and still has its greatest relevance today. One could say that the very idea of a single human heritage, rather than an Indian heritage or a western heritage, or any other parochial notion inheritance, owes a good deal to the life and teaching of Swami Vivekananda.

To be sure, Swami Vivekananda did not invent interfaith dialogue. The historic first Parliament of World Religions in 1893 was the product of a religious progressivism already in place during his time. This progressivism had been fueled, in North America, by the work of thinkers influenced by Hindu thought, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as the founders of the Theosophical Society. But even if Swamiji did not invent the interfaith movement, he can certainly

be said to have infused it with an energy and an intensity which it did not previously have. As a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji envisioned and embodied interfaith dialogue in a way that was far more radical than most conceived of it in his time. Even many of the participants in as progressive a body as the Parliament of the World Religions saw the chief function of interfaith dialogue to be "preparing the way for the reunion of all the world's religions in their true center–Jesus Christ."[2] Swamiji resisted all such parochialism and proposed, in its place, the idea of the world's religions as "different streams having their sources in different places" that "all mingle their water in the sea" that is the shared divinity of all beings.[3] Rather than insisting on the unique truth of a single cultural source, religion, or authoritative text, Swamiji saw truth as being present everywhere. He conceived, almost a century before people started using the word "globalization," of a *human* heritage made up of the many cultural streams, each originating from the unique genius of a particular people and place, but feeding into the ocean of the common human experience.

## Going Beyond Tolerance: Swamiji's Ideal of Acceptance

Swamiji envisioned inter-religious relations that would go far beyond the secular ideal of tolerance, in which practitioners of diverse traditions merely co-exist, toward an ideal of acceptance. In his famous first address at the Parliament of World Religions, he says of the Hindu tradition, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true."[4] Tolerance is of course preferable to intolerance, but it is a lesser virtue when compared with acceptance. In a 1900 lecture titled "The Way to the Realisation of a Universal Religion," Swamiji draws a stark distinction

between the lesser virtue of tolerance and the greater virtue of acceptance, saying, "Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him."[5]

As I sometimes ask my students, if one of your friends were to say to you today, "I tolerate you," would that be a compliment? How do we feel if someone tells us that they merely tolerate us? What gives them the right to decide who is allowed to exist and who is not? And what gives us the right to do that to another? We would of course not want to face the alternative of intolerance, which is all too prevalent in the world today. But tolerance alone is not enough. We can tolerate someone while ignoring them. But to truly see the divine in all, which is what Vedanta teaches us to do, we must go beyond the minimum requirement of tolerance and move toward acceptance. We must see the other not as other, but as our very own.

Indeed, this is the teaching, not only of Swami Vivekananda, but also of our Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, who tells all of us, "Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger. The whole world is your own."[6] This is true acceptance.

One can perhaps draw a parallel between these three states of being–intolerance, tolerance, and acceptance; and the ancient Vedantic (and Buddhist) teaching of the three levels of truth: falsehood (corresponding to intolerance, which sees the other as a threat that cannot be allowed to exist), relative truth (corresponding to tolerance, which sees the other as a being with

its own integrity and value that must be allowed to exist despite its problematic otherness), and absolute truth (corresponding to acceptance, which realizes the ultimate non-duality of Self and Other).

## The Internal Logical Consistency of the Harmony of Religions

There are some who criticize Swamiji's teaching of the harmony of religions, who either see it as saying simplistically that "all religions are the same," when clearly they are not, or who deride it as a form of relativism–the view that everything is true, and therefore nothing is true. Relativism, a form of skepticism, is rooted in the idea that we can never really know the truth, and therefore all attempts to express truth are of equal value. But the harmony of religions is rooted in the awareness–realized by Sri Ramakrishna through his many *sadhanas*–that truth can be realized, and that this is indeed possible by means of a variety of paths: the many systems of belief and practice that make up the shared human inheritance.

Contrary to the claims of some critics who, even today, deride the perspective that he offered, Swamiji was fully aware of the logical, philosophical problems involved in claiming that all religions are true. He even posed this question himself. "How can all these varieties be true? If one thing is true, its negation is false. How can contradictory opinions be true at the same time?"[7]

One approach to this question is to argue that the various contradictions among the teachings of the world religions are superficial, or merely apparent, and that there is a much deeper agreement and harmony among the religions than appears to be the case at first glance. Swamiji hints at this approach when he asks, "Are all the religions of the world really contradictory? I do

not mean the external forms in which great thoughts are clad. I do not mean the different buildings, languages, rituals, books, etc. employed in various religions, but I mean the internal soul of every religion."[8] This suggests that one might be able to discern an inner essence of religions–their "internal soul"–that they share, distinguishing this inner essence from that which is superficial, or merely external.

This is the idea of the perennial philosophy championed by Aldous Huxley and by other intellectuals influenced by the Vedanta movement, such as Huston Smith. It is the idea of the "metaphysics that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being."[9]

The perennial philosophy that Huxley describes is essentially Vedanta. Vedanta "recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds"–the infinite Brahman. It includes "the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality" in the form of its teaching of the non-duality of the Atman and Brahman–*tattvamasi*, *aham brahmasmi*, *sarvam khalvidam brahman*. And its ethics places our "final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being." Swamiji taught that Vedanta was not only a Hindu system of philosophy, but that it is a universal philosophy underlying all religions and philosophies. To be sure, it is a philosophy that finds particularly clear and powerful expression in the teaching of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. But it is nonetheless a universal, human inheritance.

Some have questioned, though, whether this response to the question of the many disagreements among the world religions is

too simplistic. By reducing the religions of the world to those areas where they agree with one another and with Vedanta philosophy, does one not do violence to their rich diversity? Is this truly acceptance, or is it forcing the other into our own preconceived mould, perhaps in a way that would preclude any real dialogue, where we might learn something different from the other?

Swamiji anticipates the potential charge that this approach reduces every religion to a common denominator without respecting their genuine differences. "Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion; but are they contradictory? Do they contradict or supplement each other?–that is the question."[10] Swamiji does not affirm that all religions are the same. Each religion is distinct. It has its own "soul." And while contradictions may indeed occur among the doctrines and the practices that have been formed on the basis of its core ideals–not only among religions, but even within the same religion, leading to division and sectarianism–Swamiji poses the question: Do the core insights of the various religions necessarily conflict? Or might these central ideals be logically compatible–in Swamiji's words "supplementary"? Might it be that each religion represents a core ideal, and that these ideals are not contradictory, despite each being distinct? Might they even be mutually affirming?

Swamiji takes a side on this issue: "I believe that they are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity."[11]

Swami Vivekananda's approach to religious diversity has definite implications for human conduct in the face of the great variety of beliefs and practices that exist. When one encounters a religious or philosophical claim that is contrary to one's own view, the proper attitude to take is to adhere to one's own view, but simultaneously to be open to the possibility that a kernel of truth–a genuine insight into an aspect of reality that one has not yet considered–must rest at the core of the worldview of the other. This is not relativism–throwing up one's hands in despair and asking rhetorically, "Well, who really knows the truth?" Nor is it absolutism: clinging to one's view while rejecting all others.

Pravrajika Vrajaprana summarizes Vivekananda's approach to religious diversity when she writes that, "The world's spiritual traditions are like different pieces in a giant jigsaw puzzle: each piece is different and each piece is essential to complete the whole picture. Each piece is to be honoured and respected while holding firm to our own particular piece of the puzzle. We can deepen our own spirituality and learn about our own tradition by studying other faiths. Just as importantly, by studying our own tradition well, we are better able to appreciate the truth in other tradition."[12] Swamiji's emphasis on the fact that the ideals of the religions do differ is important to highlight, particularly given the fact that critics of religious pluralism have often attacked this position with the argument that it is absurd to assert that all religions are "essentially the same" when they are very clearly quite different from one another.[13] As Vrajaprana points out, "This is not to say that all religions are 'pretty much the same.' That is an affront to the distinct beauty and individual greatness of each of the world's spiritual traditions. Saying that every religion is equally true and authentic doesn't mean that one can be substituted for the other like generic brands of aspirin."[14] A religion is like a medicine: not all medicines are alike, but all have

the power to heal–or to harm, if taken under the wrong conditions.

To say the world's religions are distinct, but that their central ideals are logically compatible, is quite different from saying that they are the same. Swamiji's teaching on religious pluralism affirms the differences among the world's religions: that the ideal to which each is oriented, is distinct. These ideals, however, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, are each "part of the great universal truth." They are not the same, nor are they interchangeable. But their basic truth can be accepted and affirmed, and practitioners of each tradition can learn from and share the insights of the others.

This is a point that Swamiji also emphasizes: that inter-religious dialogue is an important part of the process of spiritual evolution for each person in every religious tradition. The specific form that this process will take will differ from person to person, and of course from tradition to tradition. But all will benefit spiritually by engaging in it. "Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant. Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."[15]

Having been drawn, myself, from the practice of the Roman Catholic Christian tradition in, which I was raised, to the practice of Hinduism, I do not believe that Swamiji is here disallowing the

fact that one might be drawn to a particular tradition and begin to practice and identify with it, even if it is different from the tradition into which one was born. But he is saying that it is not necessary for everyone to practice the same tradition.

The ideal of a "universal religion" of which Swamiji speaks is not one of a single religion conquering and replacing all others. It is an ideal, rather, of what one might call a commonwealth of religions, each learning from and assimilating ideals of the others while continuing to develop in its own distinctive way. "My idea... is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind; and that not one can become dead, not one can be killed. Just as you cannot kill any force in nature, so you cannot kill any one of these spiritual forces. You have seen that each religion is living. From time to time it may retrograde or go forward. At one time, it may be shorn of a good many of its trappings; at another it may be covered with all sorts of trappings; but all the same, the soul is ever there, it can never be lost. The ideal which every religion represents is never lost, and so every religion is intelligently on the march."[16]

## Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda's ideal of universal acceptance, of diverse religions as being not so much contradictory as complementary, as forming distinct pieces of a vast jigsaw puzzle, as participating, each in its own way, in a broader, transcendent vision of the reality that we all share and inhabit, is even more relevant today than it was when he first articulated it, over a century ago. It has, fortunately, become an influential ideal in the western world, as the opinion polls suggest. But it is not yet shared by all.

I am often struck by the fact that Swami Vivekananda's first address in Chicago, at the Parliament of World Religions, was

delivered on September 11, 1893–exactly 108 years to the day before the notorious attacks on my own country on September 11, 2001. The number 108 of course has great significance in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain dharma traditions. Perhaps humanity was offered a chance to mend its ways when Swamiji gave his vision to the world on that day in 1893 and failed the test.

Swamiji said at the end of that address, "I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."[17] Let us pray that it will not take another 108 years for Swamiji's hope to be realized.

As long as there is religious bigotry, and as long as violence is carried out in the name of religion, the need for Swami Vivekananda's vision will be pressing and urgent. This becomes all the more evident when one takes into account the destructive capacities that our ever-increasing technological abilities make available to an ever-widening pool of actors on the global stage. The urgent need to save our human heritage by promoting the Vedantic vision of universal acceptance compels us, in Swamiji's words, to, "Arise, awake, and stop not until the goal is reached!"

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# Unity-In-Difference: Effective Intercultural Dialogue

Pravrajika Gitaprana

The rapid advance of transportation and communication technologies have brought the world's many diverse cultures together in both beneficial and destructive ways. Cultures previously concentrated in certain geographical areas now have members spread all over the globe who must live and work with others whose values, religious beliefs, social behaviours and ways of perceiving the world are vastly different from their own. While this physical meeting of cultures has given rise to a greater understanding of the commonalities and complex diversities of human existence, it also has been a source of conflict. Communication technology such as the internet, cell phones, television, etc has enabled the world to come together as never before. As news, information, and personal communication fly across the world in seconds and minutes rather than days, weeks, or months. On the other side, the very same communication technology has given rise to a new sort of media-based business and consumer-driven popular culture. Many places of the world, is beginning to overwhelm and even destroy the great diversity of cultural beliefs, practices, and ways of constructing meaning in human experience. If the richness and complexity of human experience is not to be lost—through assimilation or through violence such as wars, genocide or the loss of cultural lands by political or economic invasion and devastation—then intercultural dialogue is crucial.

I would like to begin by telling a story. The inspiration for narrating this story comes from the Native American cultures. As

a student at the Evergreen State College in Washington State, I participated in what has proven over time to be one of the most meaningful educational and intercultural experiences of my life. It was known as the Native American Educational Program.

I think it would be fair to say that the Native American concepts of education—the way children and young adults are guided to become productive, morally and socially responsible members of society—are very different from the educational practices of the currently dominant culture of the United States. The shameful history of the genocide and forced assimilation of the Native American peoples in the USA is not the subject of this discussion. Let me just say that, typically, Native American children, for many reasons, have not flourished at all in the US educational system, the kind of system that is probably familiar to most of us. In Washington State, Mary Hillaire, a member of the Lummi tribe, was the first Native American to graduate from the University of Washington. Over a number of years she developed a method of education more akin to the Native American ways of life that would enable and encourage individuals from the many tribes to make the transition to college and university study. Although the Native American Program was set up for Native American students, Mary Hillaire and her staff of elders designed the program to include a large component of intercultural dialogue. Therefore, a few non-Native American students were permitted to enroll. I was privileged to be one of those students. One of the many valuable things I learned during that time is, when addressing a gathering of any kind, it is often wise to begin with a story.

This story is about the Hindu temple in Golden Gate Park. One source for this story comes from a series of small articles hidden in the back pages of the Los Angeles Times newspaper, published periodically over the year. The second source is the

personal testimony of family members and friends. I first learned the story from a childhood friend who said to me, 'Did you know there is a Hindu temple in Golden Gate Park?'

The USA is home to individuals and groups from every culture on this earth. This is particularly true in the large urban areas. The city of San Francisco and its surrounding area is one such place. In San Francisco, there is a large and beautiful public park known as Golden Gate Park. In Golden Gate Park, the city at one time built round, dome-shaped, concrete traffic barriers to prevent vehicles from entering the pedestrian pathways. Eventually, they redesigned the pathways and so some of the concrete barriers were no longer needed. The city workers came with their heavy equipment, removed the barriers, smashed them up, and deposited the rubble in a far corner of the park. Upon this hidden pile of rubble one barrier stood intact, this round column with a dome-shaped top. It did not take long for the first anonymous Hindu, out for a stroll in the park, to notice that pile of rubble and perceive in that one intact traffic barrier some kind of crazy American Svayambhu Shiva Lingam—that is, the self-created, self-manifested Shiva Mahadeva, the great God in his unarticulated form, the ground of all being. Possibly this anonymous Hindu was the first to worship that American Shiva by placing flowers at the base of the barrier. Soon the word spread through the Indian Hindu community that there was a Svayambhu Shiva in Golden Gate Park, and so the pilgrimages began, the traditional offerings made-flowers, incense, milk, ghee, etc. Then word reached the American-born practitioners of Hinduism and they, too, began to make pilgrimages to the Shiva of the rubble pile. This then attracted the attention and respect of others, many of whom came from cultures that, like those of India, bear a great veneration for natural, spontaneous manifestations of Divine Form. This attracted the curiosity of

Americans raised in the US culture. Many Americans are only one or two generations removed from 'The Old Country' where such manifestations are still revered deep in the meadows, forests, and mountains.

Anyway, it became a regular outdoor temple, and that attracted the attention of the authorities. The dominant religious traditions in the US tend to be iconoclastic and perhaps there were complaints made to the city. The city announced that the impromptu temple in the rubble pile was not safe and would be removed. Thus, began the multicultural effort to preserve the Shiva of Golden Gate Park. Immigrant communities in the US tend to be hesitant to speak out, to oppose the authorities, but the effort to save the rubble pile Shiva had also inspired US-born Americans with no real interest in the religious or cultural tradition associated with the Shiva. US Americans tend to be passionate about their ideas of freedom. Here they perceived a breach of freedom to worship guaranteed by the US Bill of Rights. San Francisco is a very liberal city that takes a certain pride in being able to quickly organize protests. Petitions were signed. Applications were filled out and submitted. There may have been some groups of protestors. Ultimately their efforts failed and the city removed the Svayambhu Shiva from Golden Gate Park.

By telling this story I wish to introduce a few key points in the process of intercultural dialogue.

First, some of the most effective intercultural dialogues take place naturally and spontaneously when people come together to achieve a common goal. The participants in this story were not all Indian immigrants, or even practitioners of Hinduism. Many people from diverse cultural traditions came together to work on a project that, for many reasons, they thought to be important. In that process of working together they learned about each other.

A large part of the Native American Program in which I participated employed immersion-based learning and teaching. Instead of reading or hearing explanations of the various values, beliefs, and practices of the Native American peoples, we students were taken to the tribal communities to participate in the life there, most often at a special ceremony called a potlatch. It is a gift-giving ceremony. We students helped to prepare for such ceremonies, from gathering and preparing the food for a feast to participating in the songs, dances, and stories that were part of the ritual. At each step we were guided by a tribal elder who spoke as we worked about the attitude and methods such tasks required. Through participation and through this unstructured kind of dialogue we learned not only about the cultural ways and values of the Northwest Native American people, but also about the Native American method of education. Native American cultures are predominantly oral cultures. They have a profound respect for the spoken word and deliberate, careful, meaningful speech. Meaningful speech and the personal contact with the elders is the method of education they tend to prefer.

Later in Los Angeles I was a member of another kind of informal, activity-based intercultural dialogue. This was actually an interfaith group that had convened after 9-11 to work in the city in order to erase some of the causes for religious and culturally based violence that so plagues our world. Los Angeles and New York are the two most culturally diverse cities in the US, so this group, being interfaith, was also multicultural and multiracial. It included equal numbers of men and women, clergy, monastics, and laypeople. This group was not an interfaith group that existed just to show that individuals of different faiths and cultures could sit on the same platform and give nice speeches. In order to work effectively in the community, this group had to work out and take positions on some of the most difficult social

and geopolitical conflicts currently facing humankind. The foundation upon which this group built its understanding was a belief in a greater reality, a trust of one another, and a caring concern for all beings. There were many very heated, emotionally-charged debates as members from the various religions and cultures took positions that were in conflict with others. But the group had resolved that no action would be undertaken unless all the members could agree on a common position. This was not easy. But intercultural dialogue was the means to find that common ground.

The second point in the process of intercultural dialogue is: there are some values and principles shared universally by people around the globe. Truly effective intercultural dialogues begin by building trust based on that foundation of unity, and then go on to explore the many differences that exist between the participants of the dialogue. Religious leaders have often spoken in terms of the common goals of humanity. Swami Vivekananda often stated that freedom was the common goal, not just for humanity but for all of nature. In modern times, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has often expressed the Buddhist view that all beings want to be happy and avoid suffering. The well-known business writer and consultant, Stephen R. Covey, has identified some of these human commonalities, which he calls principles. These principles are 'a part of every major enduring religion, as well as enduring social philosophies and ethical systems. They are self-evident and can be easily validated by any individual....They seem to exist in all human beings, regardless of social conditioning and loyalty to them, even though they might be submerged or numbed by such conditions or disloyalty.'[1] Dr. Covey identifies some of these principles: fairness, integrity, honesty, human dignity, service, patience, nurturance, and encouragement, for example.[2]

Basing an intercultural dialogue on a foundation of unity by exploring similarities is an effective way to start building connection among its members. However, human beings are not all alike. Too much emphasis on similarity, if insensitively presented, can lead to problems.

Dr. Milton Bennett is co-founder of the Intercultural Communication Institute and director of the Intercultural Development Research Institute. He points out that if similarities are naively emphasized, the dialogue process may easily be lost in what he describes as the assumptions of The Golden Rule. The Golden Rule as stated in the Bible says, "Therefore all things whatsoever that ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them…"(Matthew 7:12). He states: "The Golden Rule is typically used as a kind of template for behavior. If I am unsure of how to treat you, I simply imagine how I myself would like to be treated, and then act in accordance….Under this assumption lies another, more pernicious belief: all people are basically the same, and thus they really *should* want the same treatment (whether they admit it or not) as I would."[3] This misguided assumption of sameness, as Dr. Bennett points out, is also 'a poor guide for effective communication. Assuming that others are like ourselves when we talk to them is tantamount to talking to ourselves. We fail to recognize the crucial differences to which our communication must be accommodated, and our efforts to understand and be understood are subverted by a façade of uniformity.'[4] US Americans are particularly apt to fall into the assumption of sameness, as we have been brought up in a culture that emphasizes equality almost above all else. We unthinkingly are prone to make the assumption that all people are alike, considering that to be a derivative of the notion of equality. The Native American elders who were my advisors always scoffed at that erroneous notion of equality. 'We don't WANT to be equal, in that sense,' they said, 'We want to be equivalent.'

Again, too much emphasis on similarity may condemn the dialogue to superficiality. The truly deep dialogues often take place when members take the personal risk to understand and explore the many differences that exist among cultures. Too much emphasis on similarity, while well-meant, may have the opposite effect, making members uncomfortable and hesitant to speak freely about differences.

We must bear in mind that intercultural dialogues are not always profound. They may begin by asking a silly question like, 'In your childhood stories, what noise does a sheep, a cow, or a horse make?' They may begin when someone tells a joke and then tries to explain it.

Third, intercultural dialogues necessarily require the use of language. An effective intercultural dialogue must enable participants to explore and understand the many ways language is used by all the members of the group. It is important for the participants to be aware that the way in which language is perceived and employed varies widely from culture to culture. For instance, some cultures communicate important information in a direct manner, through the lens of empirical, tangible evidence, which they see as scientifically-proven facts and therefore truths. On the other hand, a large number of the world's cultures prefer to communicate important information, values, and truths through the use of story—a creative, sometimes traditional form of communication that is often based upon a reverence for the power and sacredness of language itself.

Although it may be rather obvious, the participants in an intercultural dialogue must be aware that the language in which the dialogue is being conducted may not be the native language of all the participants. Some of the participants may find it difficult to understand a common language spoken with a different accent than the one they typically hear. Even within the same country a

common language may be spoken with a different accent and there may be the problem of unconscious cultural stereotyping associated with different regional accents. For instance, in the US, even among American-born English speakers, there are many regional variations in accent. There is a pernicious, unconscious belief lingering among some US-born Americans that people with a Southern accent are stupid or uneducated.

Members of a dialogue must be aware that the language that flows naturally from their tongue may contain slang or colloquial terms that others in the group may not understand at all. For example: 'Like, I got in this way cool intercultural dialogue thing, ya know and, like, it was so, like, totally awesome! So, like, I go to my homie, ya know, I mean, she just came from India, and I go "I'm, like, so jazzed! There's this dialogue group, like, where a whole bunch of folks, they, like, talk about culture and stuff. Like, I am so right on with that. You should join!" This kind of colloquial English in common use, particularly among young people in the US, is barely understandable to native English speakers anywhere in the world, let alone those for whom English is a second language.

Effective dialogues also address the possibility of non-verbal misinterpretation. It is important to be aware that sensory experience is interpreted by individuals through the lens of their culture. Facial expressions, gestures, body postures, and movements are understood differently in different cultural contexts. In various cultures a smile can be an expression of personal warmth, a mask for nervousness, or a totally superficial polite social observance. A discussion of what constitutes polite behavior in the different cultures represented in the dialogue is absolutely necessary at the very outset. It is a wonderful way to introduce the immensely diverse range of human experience.

Fourth, all the previous points assume that the participants in a meaningful intercultural dialogue possess or develop the ability to listen in an open-minded way without bias. This means that each member must be guided to the understanding that every individual's experience of the world, even the way he thinks, is the product of very deep cultural beliefs and assumptions absorbed from their families, friends, schools, religion, and the culture in which they grew up. There must be an honest and open examination of the common stumbling blocks of intercultural communication—for example, stereotyping or assuming a patronizing attitude as a form of defense against feeling uncomfortable. True intercultural dialogue is sometimes uncomfortable as individuals discover or are led by others to confront their own, often unconscious, cultural attitudes and assumptions.

Another point to mention is that, in order for intercultural dialogue in any form to be truly effective, participants should know about their own culture and their own cultural history. This includes the high points as well as the low points. In the history of almost every culture there has been violence—wars, genocides, the oppression of others. We cannot whitewash these events, justify them, or pretend they did not happen. In a dialogue it may happen that individuals who experienced such violence, or whose families may have fled or survived violence, oppression, or displacement, meet members of the culture that they perceive to have perpetrated the violence. Some of the victims and the children of victims may carry a great deal of anger or fear towards the culture responsible for the violence. They may verbalize it very forcefully, impelled by the intensity of the emotion. If we truly wish to avoid further violence in this world, there must be a safe place for those who experience violence and oppression to speak out without being patronizingly told that they

are wrong, misguided, or not behaving in an acceptably nice intercultural way. It can be a very painful process for both the speakers and for the listeners. We must listen to the voices of the victimized and the dispossessed with an open mind, an open heart, and great respect. I have witnessed Israeli Jews listening openly to powerful condemnations by Palestinian Muslims and visa versa. As a white American I myself have listened to the pain and anger expressed by Native Americans and African-Americans, as they recounted all the violence, genocide, slavery, and continued oppression that they and their people have experienced at the hands of the dominant culture of the US. We must recognize that there are cultures within cultures that may also experience violence and oppression, who are considered inferior or deviant by the dominant culture. This may include, for instance, women, people of color, so-called foreigners, and people who are homosexual.

Effective intercultural dialogues must recognize that the assumptions and presuppositions of culture are sometimes extremely subtle, difficult even for an individual raised within a culture to articulate. Sometimes the listeners in a dialogue may have no similar suppositions within their own culture, making it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand at a deep level.

Cultural anthropologists and others who study the expressions of human behaviour have organized the many attitudes that may be assumed when individuals and groups from one culture encounter another. Dr. Milton Bennett, already quoted a, has cited the Developmental Model for Intercultural Sensitivity, which organizes the types of intercultural understanding found among individuals and groups along a progression from *ethnocentric to ethnorelative*.[5] Ethnocentric is defined as using one's own cultural standards as the standard for judging all human behaviour. Ethnorelative individuals accept

that there is a great diversity of standards and customs among the people of the world, all equally valid. These individuals are comfortable adapting to a wide variety of interpersonal situations. In between the two poles lie six progressive stages of development.

The first stage is denial. This kind of viewpoint is most commonly found among people who have lived in relative isolation— in a country, neighbourhood, or in a restricted social group. These people might not be aware that cultural differences exist. If they are aware, they may tend to think of others in terms of stereotypes. 'Mexicans are lazy. Westerners are materialistic. Asians are inscrutable.'

The second stage is defense. There is more cultural awareness at this stage, but individuals feel threatened by this awareness and defend their own culture as the best, the highest, while ranking the others according to negative stereotypes.

The third stage is minimization. Here people accept superficial cultural differences but ignore the profound influence culture has upon individual experience and thought. These people believe that, once the differences in customs are stripped away, people are all alike. As I have mentioned above, this may lead to mistaking the values of a particular culture to be the universals of human existence. 'Everybody wants to be like us,' US Americans often assume, happily accepting the myth, not to mention the cultural chauvinism, of The American Dream.

The fourth stage is acceptance. People at this stage are aware and interested in the various expressions of cultural diversity but still tend to remain within the familiar haven of their own cultural understandings and customs.

The fifth stage is adaptation. People at this stage can take a variety of standpoints. They are able to empathize and take other cultural perspectives besides their own.

The final stage is integration. Individuals have internalized the understanding that human diversity presents numerous ways of experiencing and of evaluating actions in this world. They can move easily through a broad spectrum of cultural experience with the understanding that there are no universal right or wrong answers, no absolute ethics that rigidly determine behaviour for all.

The goal, then, for intercultural dialogue is to foster the growth of such multiculturally sensitive and adapted individuals who then bring their understanding to bear on the many critical issues that threaten today the survival of cultures and even humanity and the very earth we all inhabit.

I have presented a few elements found in most effective intercultural dialogues. I have suggested that a dialogue process may begin with an examination of the notion of unity, moving on to explore the many differences present within the human experience, finally arriving at a notion of unity-in-difference. I have discussed a few different kinds of dialogue that I have witnessed and what made them into a truly deep opportunity for sharing among individuals. I have also mentioned a few of the common stumbling blocks we might encounter in the process, which, if not addressed, may confine the dialogue to a certain superficial level or even into one that is merely a lot of useless, abstract, intellectual positioning in the name of unity.

I would like to conclude with an observation that Swami Vivekananda made to an audience in London. He pointed out that, while unity may be a metaphysical reality, variation is the law of nature and it will always be so. After recounting the many discussions of unity and diversity that have taken place in many cultures since ancient times, he observed that the real issue confronting humanity is the notion of privilege. He declared:

The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. This

is the work which tends towards sameness, towards unity, without destroying variety.

The work of ethics has been, and will be in the future, not the destruction of variation and the establishment of sameness in the external world—which is impossible for it would bring death and annihilation—but to recognize the unity in spite of all these variations, to recognize the God within, in spite of everything that frightens us, to recognize that infinite strength as the property of everyone in spite of all apparent weakness, and to recognize the eternal, infinite, essential purity of the soul in spite of everything to the contrary that appears on the surface....Taking one side alone, one half only of the position, is dangerous and liable to lead to quarrels. We must take the whole thing as it is, stand on it as our basis and work it out in every part of our lives, as individuals and as unit members of society'.[6]

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# Seventh Academic Session

# States and the Use of Force: Trends and Restraints

Anindyo Jyoti Majumdar

Competition that ensues in the effort to accumulate power to ensure relative economic gains or a sense of injury incurred in the process, lead not merely to a clash of interests, but sustained adversarial relations among states and the difference of perception and disagreement on specific issues of vital interests, lead to hostility and eventually to conflict. Depending on their respective political and professional orientations, scholars point out various reasons and circumstances for armed conflicts and war. While the biologists focus on human gene characteristics, economists on markets and competition, the political scientists usually focus on the anarchic international system and contesting ideologies. However, from low intensity violence to war – conflicts can take many forms involving states or within states. Solutions follow a similar pattern depending on the circumstances and causes of a particular conflict.

States, the primary units of international relations, use force frequently in their relations with one another and justifies such use on the ground of supreme interest of the nation. The predominant consideration is survival, hence security. In effect, any action that includes use or threat of force, sometimes including obvious blatant acts of unprovoked aggression, can be legitimised on grounds of state interest and security. States formulate strategies to achieve the usual goals of security, economic well-being, autonomy and prestige. Strategy is a voluntary response to

the environment, a response by the agency to the existing structure - an amalgamation of certain protective and promotional measures. But these strategies have certain common patterns when it comes to state behaviour.

In its conventional sense, security may be understood as national military security where threat or use of force is brought into play to protect and promote national interests. In effect, conventional security is state security and by extension, the security of the people of the state. The State has the duty to protect the life and property of its citizens from attacks from beyond its borders and establish internal stability, law and order.

The dominant approach of analysis in International Relations – Realism – in all its variants upholds the primacy of the state in ensuring security. It assumes conflict of interests among states as inevitable and the purpose of statecraft is national survival in a hostile environment.

In the absence of a central enforcing authority, the neo-realists argue, there is a situation of anarchy where states need to resort to self-help to survive and flourish. This leads to continuous augmentation of power and establishment of alliance arrangements as and when necessary. Even the international institutions that prescribe rules of responsible behaviour are essentially platforms of power struggle and states cannot entrust the task of self-protection to international security organizations. Maximization of power being the national goal, stability will result by maintaining a balance of power. Moral principles are apparently interferences in the pursuit of national advantage.

It is to be noted here that not all states are 'states' in true sense and a distinction must be made between weak and fragile territorial collection of human beings on the one hand and the 'state' as a major actor in international relations on the other.

Realism, as an explanation of international politics, ignores the weak states, provides legitimacy to the policies of major powers and fuels the ambition of the middle powers.

The liberal approaches, on the other hand, focus on transnational relations and regimes, economic ties, cooperation and interdependence among states and ethical and human concern for people. Though this approach, within its limitations, might have a universal appeal, the realist approaches have dominated the conventional understanding of security.

In the contemporary world, security is no longer confined to the consequences and the by-products of the power struggles among states but various non-conventional / non-traditional security issues have emerged. However, if conventional security could also be viewed in its prismatic elements, it could be seen that many of so called non-conventional security issues were basically intertwined with the conventional concerns. Security is an indivisible whole, if any aspect is neglected, it would have a bearing upon the entire form. Nevertheless, new security issues are trans-boundary challenges and therefore, require a certain degree of forced cooperation among states. As war among states becomes immensely lethal, destructive, and expensive with very little to offer in return in terms of material benefit, non-conventional issues of global concern now occupy the centre place.

For example, climate change and environmental degradation can be a global security threat that calls for concerted and collaborative actions and using force instead would not serve the requisite purpose. On the other hand, depletion of natural resources like fossil fuel and fresh water can instigate a new bout of rivalry among states and in spite of good reasoning and fearful consequences that might ensue, force might still be used in order to have near-exclusive control over such resources.

Despite the emergence of issues of common concern, the power struggle continues among states, coercive measures short of war are employed to ensure national advantage and the powerful ones still decide and impact on the agenda of world politics (including non-conventional security issues) and prescribe the rules of the game.

Many of these policies go under the name of self-defence. The right of self-defence is sacrosanct but the extension of such right leads to pre-emptive actions under the guise of pro-active defence.

War as a policy had been the prerogative of the states but with the restrictions imposed by international conventions with the states as parties, new euphemisms like 'armed conflict' or 'operations' have replaced the old term. However the militarist tendencies of the states – especially of the major actors – remain.

Though the idea of the nation-state is the creation of the West, not all ideas that are related to the use of force are truly western in nature but certain universal trends have been forcefully articulated by the West and copied by the rest.

On the other hand,Cooperative Security presupposes that actors in a regional theatre would realize that security is multilateral and not unilateral. Very often, states exist within a security complex where the primary security concerns are sufficiently closely linked and as a result national security of any one state cannot be realistically considered without considering its repercussions for others. A state's arming for defence purposes provokes other states to arm in response and the inevitable result is that the overall security of all declines as their armament increases. This feature known as 'security dilemma' can be avoided if the adversaries interact to establish an

environment of security by means of assurance and confidence-building, recognizing each other's legitimate security needs. Thereby they can form a security community which is however different from latent war-communities like military alliances. Less than institutional, informal negotiations and mutual understanding aimed at establishing a stable security milieu are the features of cooperative security.

Here, an exploration into the Indian strategic thinking as an alternative paradigm would not be out of place.

From experience, it may be said that unlike the Western practices, apparently in India, there is a great abhorrence for use of force as a means for solution of political problems *except in the Indian sub-continent.* It is of course a different issue of protecting ones' own motherland from military attacks by the adversary. But retaliation involving use of force as a response to the injury of the country's interests would hardly be spontaneous and may come in a series of stages that begins with political bargaining and negotiation. India might participate in peacekeeping missions, but using force with the objective of enforcing peace, humanitarian intervention or regime change operations are almost out of question. *The sub-continent however is a different area.* India's security considerations here stretch from the Himalayas to the seas. Force can be used in this region if diplomacy fails and interests are threatened. This approach may gradually include the greater part of the Indian Ocean Region in future by means of incremental expansion of core security.

If the Indian doctrines convey the message of non-provocative defense, if it is not predatory in character, if it spreads a culture of non-domination – it is not by an accident or sheer inability to formulate so-called 'right' policies in line with

the pre-dominant trends. This position may defy certain beliefs, practices and theories with regard to strategy formulation from either liberal or realist angles, or military prudence, but that does not mean that there would be no other criteria that cannot be applied by the non-western actors to their advantage, especially when attitude and emotion become important elements of so-called 'rational' policy-formulation.

Termed as 'strategic restraint', or even 'strategic timidity', the Indian attitude has led scholars to believe that India's strategies have not developed in keeping with its growing military and economic strength[1]. In fact, viewed in the traditional sense, it cannot. This culture of non-domination is, first, a result of India's cultural heritage and historical experience and second, a deliberate choice in conformity with its growing but limited abilities.

The cultural heritage adds much importance to converting Hard Power into Soft Power.Every actor has a strategy as every actor is perforce compelled to respond to the environment. India has been the land of amalgamation of different entities, ideas and cultures. Migrants, invaders, conquerors came to India through ages and frequently the problem of adjustment and accommodation occurred. At any rate, there have been recurrent conflicts, military campaigns and war. Every group had their own art of war and too much variety actually prevented the emergence of a distinctly Indian art of war. What remains are the views and interpretations scattered in literary works.

Within the conflicting claims that emanate from a unique blend of peace and conflict trajectories in India, it may be said that from the ancient days, war has been viewed as a necessary instrument of achieving an objective but the generally accepted wisdom has been that the consolidation of the gains of war

depends on maturity, restraint and humane conduct. This is a pragmatic posture where a powerful entity (or hard power) is expected to be magnanimous with the tendency of adhering to a code of conduct in order to earn respect (or soft power).

If we look at the ancient Indian practices, Chanakya (or Kautilya) epitomizes realpolitik. He was the Prime Minister of Chandrgupta Maurya and his son Bindusar. Within one generation, however the Kautilyan policies were discarded by Asok, son of Bindusar, who adopted confidence-building. Kautilya's prescriptions were for a small state that aspires to become a major one by applying various methods, often disregarding moral principles. For him, war and conquest only precede peace to be established by the *Chakravartin*. The Asokan Empire was not militarily weak, but military power was converted into soft power by deliberate choice of policies. The same can be said about the Mughal Emperor Akbar. It is not a coincidence that these two emperors are referred to as Asoka the Great and Akbar the Great. The point is, force has often been used in India, by these two great emperors as well, but the exemplary emperors have been those who went beyond mere use of force and established certain standards that have been accepted as model roles for kings.

Indeed Kautilya's teaching lost much of its ground in the early Middle Ages, as with the growth of feudalism emerged the ideal of 'arrogant chivalry' as an essential ingredient of *ksatra-dharma*. Unrestrained chivalry meant anything that is opposite to chivalric virtues, honour and dignity: a sudden attack, intrigue, treachery etc. were regarded as the acts of low *ksatriyas*. The spy system declined and the king's army often consisted of disparate groups operating under their respective chiefs and there was a great deal of difficulty in effectively commanding

such an army. Equally difficult was coordination and planning. Obviously, there were battle plans and strategies. But then came the Turks and Afghans who had comparative knowledge of the different prevailing practices of the Hindu, the Tajik, the Iranian; they relied on mobility, skill, planning, discipline, unity and effectiveness of command, efficiency of the espionage system; liberally used strategic surprises, diversions, night attacks, feigned retreats. The Mughals had a great combination of mounted archers, effective artillery and infantry with firearms. The South was not free from such developments.It is to be further noted that the Indian agrarian society was to a large extent an armed society often called to provide service in military campaigns and 'there was an almost limitless availability of armed peasants who presented themselves constantly on the Indian military labor market'[2].

Moreover, as India came under the control of the British, '(at) the end of the eighteenth century Europe's art of war had clearly gained momentum in India'[3]. Warfare was becoming the exclusive purview of the nation-state and the expression and instrument of national interest. At the same time, 'the experience with the British Raj provided India with a geopolitical frame of reference that continues to influence present-day Indian strategy'[4]. It has been a case of evolution of strategies for India under various stimuli and engagements that predominantly sought to chart out a pragmatic arrangement under different compulsions.

The socio-cultural factor was reflected in the Hindu caste system too. The highest position in the hierarchy had been enjoyed by the men of knowledge, not by the men of sword, i.e. force was made subservient to wisdom.

And then in India the dominant thinking has never been to exterminate the locals or the aborigines, as some European powers did in other parts of the world, and hardly have we come across instances of Indian military expeditions in other countries except perhaps of the Cholas in Southeast Asia or of the legend of Vijayasimha's expedition to Simhala. There again, integration was more important than extermination. In fact, as a self-contained empire, Indian armed forces serve more as guarantors of internal stability and defense against foreign threats and incursions. The possession of vast and diverse landmass, huge spaces and masses of human beings led to '...a specific strategic culture. War is seen through defensive lenses'[5].

During the freedom struggle, the predominant technique was Gandhian non-violence which again was a pragmatic option and not merely a creed of pacifism. The very approach, often criticized as the rejection of the warrior-cultures of India, had its impact upon the evolution of the strategic culture of independent India. It is interesting to note that within this broad framework of peaceful and morally superior vision of India, revolutionary uprisings did occur as in Chittagong, or an army was raised like the INA under Subhas Chandra Bose to fight with the British.

In short, India has never been free of conflicts but a search for a middle path added more value to *soft power backed up by military capabilities* that are not to be ordinarily used.

In the international system where rules of the game are determined by the prevalent major powers, one is expected to play by those rules and ethical prescriptions are hardly to be subscribed to. During the cold war period, India, of necessity, had to operate often between two extremes, between two superpowers with their alliances, two contending political ideologies, and two blocs representing development and

underdevelopment. India has never been in the middle maintaining equidistance from two extremes but chose flexibility in lateral movements.

The end of the cold war ushered in a new era which focused on globalization and roughly coincided with India's economic reforms programme. Economics, it was felt, would dominate world politics in an integrated border-less world. In the bipolar world where smaller states were almost eliminated – at least in perception though not in reality – India had taken pragmatic steps to keep her interests afloat. The post-cold war era provided opportunities to rebuild relations and India exercised flexibility by reaching out to all.

Even today, the Indian Defence Doctrines aim to achieve a non-provocative strategic capability. They simply convey a message of deterring threats and defending the nation's interests in what India perceives as its defined legitimate area of interest. Likewise, the nuclear doctrine with its no-first use principle and credible minimum deterrence, once again reflects the culture of a non-predatory character. It even included a section on arms control while suggesting that a nuclear weapons-free world was the ultimate goal.

Strategy building essentially follows the established western style, as also the pattern of interaction within the established Westphalian framework. Net assessment, mean bean counting, introduction of new technologies and new dimensions – cyber and space, revolution in military affairs – every element is an important part of strategy-formulation. However, empirical and analytical reports involving net assessments of scenarios may contribute to pragmatic policy-formulation and effective contingency planning but might not change the basic attitude and culture of non-domination that guides the action.

It is thus important to initiate comparative studies in the foreign-policy and security strategies of non-western powers to explore whether the aforementioned pattern is unique to India or there exist common threads of regular similarities with other middle powers and emerging powers. A comparative analytical discourse of strategic cultures of non-western states might lead us to build theories on the art of non-domination as an alternative to the contemporary wisdom.

## Restraining Measures

Attempts have been made to curb the militarist tendencies of the states over the years. In fact, the experience of total wars has led to various attempts on part of the international community to exercise control over such conflicts. After the First World War (1914-18), the League of Nations was established and a half-hearted measure was adopted in order to renounce war. The members of the League were required to seek a peaceful settlement of their disputes first before resorting to war. It did not prohibit the states from exercising the customary right to wage war. The League was not a successful organization and could not prevent the Second World War (1939-45).

However, outside the League, an important attempt was made to prevent war. It was known as the General Treaty for the Renunciation of War or Paris Peace Pact 1928. The signatories condemned recourse to war for the solution of international controversies and renounced war as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another. The signatories also agreed that the solution of all disputes or conflicts would be sought by peaceful means. Nevertheless, there were many shortcomings of the treaty in so far as war was permitted in self-defence, as a measure of collective action, and between the

signatories of the Pact and the non-signatories. Lack of authoritative determination of the breach of obligations and the problem in defining 'what constitutes war' and 'use of force short of war' left much to the discretion of the signatory states.

After the Second World War, the United Nations Organization (UNO) was established in 1945. It is based on the principle of collective security which is a voluntary system of regulation where use of military force as an instrument of national policy is forbidden. Act of aggression or breach of peace by one state is viewed as an attack against all and punitive sanctions – diplomatic, economic or military – are imposed against the offender collectively by all other states. However, there are many practical problems associated with this system as it tends to provide special status to the great powers (the permanent members of the Security Council of the UN) that are primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Depending on their preferences at a given point of time, these powers show a tendency of selective engagement, i.e. choosing to intervene militarily in some situations but declining to do so in others.

However, as war is increasingly viewed as not the legitimate prerogative of the state but a breakdown of the normal system, various methods of settlement of disputes peacefully have been propagated and recognized by the UN Charter. The members of the UN have the obligation to settle disputes peacefully and not to use force in their relations with one another. States who get involved in armed conflict which is not a part of collective action mandated by the UN try to camouflage the presence of war now by using euphemisms like campaigns, operations etc. to avoid legal complications.

The second important step is to settle disputes peacefully. Since disputes are quite common and frequent and very often

they disturb and endanger international peace and security, the basic objectives of international law includes the development of methods to resolve such disputes through peaceful means. Politics, is essentially concerned with conflicts and the reconciliation of conflicts. In other words, dispute can be settled through mutual accommodation, persuasion and a change of perceptions. Or, there can be a forced imposition of a solution by the victor or a third party. International disputes are no exception. These disputes can be settled either by pacific (or peaceful) means, or by coercive (or compulsive means).

Article 33, paragraph 1 of the UN Charter stipulates:The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall first of all seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangement, or other peaceful means of their own choice.

Of these, arbitration and judicial settlement are legal techniques that involve a third party hearing the case and issuing binding decisions, whereas the other methods are diplomatic.

International or regional institutions and organizations highlight the aspects of functional cooperation among states. The simple logic here is: war is not desirable, comprehensive peace is not feasible: the best options are then adopting measures to prevent conflict, managing conflict situations, reducing the frequency and intensity of conflict and finally, resolving a conflict. It follows a prioritization of the role of intellect over instinctive actions where the fear of the form future conflict will take exercises the restraining effect.

Conflict Avoidance and Confidence Building are two important steps towards Conflict Resolution. Conflict Avoidance

Measures (in the form of unilateral or bilateral declaration of ceasefire / non-aggression / non-interference) prepare the platform for effective confidence-building measures (CBMs). These measures are aimed at providing assurance that adversaries would not surprise one another and mount a disabling military strike and to this effect, would adopt specific procedures and methods that corroborate the declared intension like flag meetings at the border, advance notification of military exercises and movements of forces, prior information of weapons tests etc. Viewed thus, CBMs are essentially military in nature.

However, non-military CBMs are also viewed as important contributors to the betterment of overall relations between two adversaries. Non-military CBMs may include any positive move towards constructing an environment of working relationship free of conflict among the adversaries. Communication links, mutually beneficial economic relations, people-to-people contact and cultural exchanges, connectivity – all contribute to improving relations between two adversaries. The theory came after practice i.e. the 1975 Helsinki process in Europe that improved relations between the Eastern bloc and the Western bloc during the Cold War era and then the methods were sought to be applied in other regional theatres. A process in a regional theatre however must begin with a broad vision; otherwise, CBMs can become yet another instrument of diplomatic offensive.

Often the progress in negotiating CBMs is painfully slow. After a phase of intense adversity when normal relations come to a stop, CBMs in fact become necessary to put back relations on the track. As a result, bus links, rail links, sporting links or cultural links are either suspended or re-instituted depending on the general level of bilateral animosity and the CBMs hardly help to substantially alter the basic behavioural patterns.

No wonder, many would argue that CBMs (especially non-military CBMs) as a rule are not very effective in improving relations among the adversaries, it might work under some circumstances and it might not in some other cases. Even some would go to the extent of saying that they are least effective when they are most needed and most effective when they are least needed[6]. In other words, they mean to say that non-military CBMs are instituted and maintained when the relations are good and in times of conflict all these communication links, economic and cultural linkages are the first victims and come to an abrupt halt.

Specific measures of arms control among the adversaries however may help reduce the possibility of use of force and transform hostile relations. Armament or procuring arms for security is viewed as a legitimate action. However, in an attempt to ensure adequate preparation for a possible war and to outdo the adversary, states keep on increasing the quality and the number of weapons and forces, and thereby they enter into a competition among themselves which is known as the arms race. An arms race does not necessarily indicate the imperialist or hegemonic ambitions of the parties involved; arms race often gathers its own momentum irrespective of the state policy. An action of procuring or producing arms is sought to be replicated by the adversary in a possible reaction. The three main services of the armed forces – army, navy and air force – compete among themselves for a greater share of the defence budget of the country leading to a net increase in the stock of weapons of a state. Driven by the motive of earning profit and boosting up sales, the firms engaged in the production of arms and military equipment, try to influence the decision-makers of states to buy their products. Moreover, the progress of science gives birth to

newer sophisticated weapons alluring states to have the best arms available and thereby instigating a new bout of arms race.

An uncontrolled arms race introduces tension and instability in relations among states. Many well-meaning people have considered arms race being the cause of many evils. For them, it is a waste of economic and human resources, for one could use the money spent on arms for development of infrastructure or engage the best brains for better purposes than producing weapons. Weapons tests cause environmental damage and from an ethical standpoint, we perhaps do not have the right to make the world a very dangerous place for the future generations. In order to escape the perils of arms race, disarmament has always been an available option.

The term disarmament is used in a general sense (as the opposite to 'armament') and as such it connotes the idea of reduction or complete abolition of armament. In its absolute sense, disarmament means complete abolition of all weapons and weapon-systems, and disestablishment of all armed forces. This is called Total Disarmament or the General and Comprehensive Disarmament: general, as it covers all states, and comprehensive, as it covers all weapons and forces. On the face of it, the very idea of a general and comprehensive disarmament seems utopian and very idealistic. So, a practical approach would include abolition of a particular type of weapons or reduction in number of existing weapons (especially, if we take armament as an increase in number and improvement of the quality of arms) which is better be described as partial disarmament. At any rate, the distinguishing feature of disarmament is - abolition or reduction.

However, a weak power is tempted to emphasize on disarmament – not in the primary interest of global peace – but to

minimize the existing gaps between it and the powerful states. By the same logic, the powerful states resolutely refuse to get into any arrangement that will (in their perception) bring them down to the level of other states. The tussle therefore continues without any concrete achievement. The inadequacies of the disarmament approach and the feeling of frustration as a consequence made way for acceptance of another approaching, as, in the 1950s, the idea of arms control emerged. Broadly, arms control denotes all measures involving weapons and weapon-systems aiming at minimizing the possibility of unintentional war and if war breaks out to minimize the cost and damage of war. Arms control is therefore adopted by many states as the goal of state policy. Apart from abolition or reduction of arms, arms control process includes limitations, prohibitions, or restrictions on experiments, productions or use of particular weapons.

One major aim of arms control is to create a situation of stability where both the parties are more or less evenly matched and the result of war would be uncertain. To create such a situation of stability, arms control advocates can support even increase of arms in certain cases. Here is a point of departure from disarmament process. Advocates of disarmament would never support increase in arms under any circumstances. The objectives of arms control is to control those elements and factors that induce or tempt states to go to war. For example, arms control advocates support nuclear deterrence, while the disarmament advocates do not. However, arms control would seek to establish and re-establish balance at a lower level of armaments with less cost by continuous negotiation and management. Reductions are pursued in so far as they did not threaten stability. Stable balance is highly regarded as an effective device of maintaining peace by creating a stand-off

situation. However, if the adversaries can agree on what constitutes the minimum requirements for a stable military balance, then it is always easy to cancel the extras. Thus arms control may include reduction and elimination of particular types of weapons and thereby give the impression that it is but disarmament in easy steps but in effect, the very approach of arms control differs from that of disarmament.

Arms control, as a goal of state policy, can be used to maintain a status quo, dominance of a few over the rest and the negotiations (especially on verification aspects) can be exploited as an instrument of deriving political mileage through propaganda. Under such circumstances, balance-stability consideration may take a backseat.

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are those weapons use of which blurs the sacrosanct distinction between the military targets and non-military civilian lives and properties, and the lethal effect of which hardly remains limited to the combat-area. There is another way of defining WMD purely based on the type of physical elements present in the weapon: chemical, biological and nuclear. No wonder, most of the serious arms control efforts have been directed towards restraining production, stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruction. However, it is also argued that the main task of nuclear weapons is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons as the fear of complete annihilation restrains people from hasty actions. Nuclear weapons introduce stability in relations and prevent all-out war and hence, these weapons are weapons of peace.

## Assessment

Progress in institution and regime-building in international relations is a process of trial and error. Though the process may

lead to incremental success but a lasting solution might prove elusive as the problem and the solution - which essentially aims at crisis-management – both change in nature and characteristics while responding to specific power arrangements at a particular time period. The politics of use of force reflects the intercourse of political, economic and strategic interests of the major actors that build but also corrupt and eventually dismantle regimes as the power equations change over time.

The use of force therefore, is a crucial part of international politics. Despite all efforts to restrain the militarist tendencies in terms of treaties, international law and norms, confidence-building and arms control, they appear inadequate.Even before the popularity of the term 'civil society' that is in vogue today, the public had played a moderate role in restraining state's war efforts by expressing the mood of the nation through 'no more war' movements. And people continue to do so. But often, people's power is activated in desperate situations. A sustained pressure upon policy-makers is virtually absent.

None of these measures however have human unity in mind as the true objective. Security issues thrive on differences by assuming differences as threats. Unity requires respect and recognition of apparent differences as natural. It also requires a basic level of enlightenment. There are aberrations galore but on the whole we are making increasing progress towards the realization that unity might not mean homogenization but accommodation and tolerance towards different cultures and systems. The efficacy of the culture of non-predatory non-domination therefore needs to be explored further.

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# Need of Curbing Military Tendencies in States of India's Frontier

Sankar Roy Chowdhury

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be present in this distinguished gathering on a subject with which like my friend Anindya here, I am also not too familiar. So what I will try and comment, are really my thoughts and feelings and my opinion. Now the overall subject of the series of seminar that are being organized, is the International Understanding for Human Unity within which is the need for curbing military tendencies of states. Now I could not help notice that in discussing this issue we have been talking of wars as a finite entity. You declare war and then you have a go through a certain procedure but that is a totally anachronistic and a defunct procedure. The last time anyone declared war, was in 1939. What are we talking about? No one declares war nowadays. War is never declared, war takes place. And what is war? War itself, there is no definition of war. War is conflict. You may say politics by other means. You may say all these other definitions. But war is conflict. War can be nuclear conflict; war can be conventional warfare which is taking place fairly regularly now or war can be proxy war; war can be reveler; war can be insurgency; war can be low intensity warfare. So under the grouping of war that spectrum itself has expanded exponentially. So we do not really know what war is. War is any conflict of any type. It is here that the concept which has been put out regarding just and unjust wars comes in and there is something to it but that is not really the subject of what I am supposed to say. I am supposed to talk about India's frontiers

because in the middle of the entire philosophy of human understanding and also the fact that these are international principles ultimately you got to crystallize on certain examples as rocal points. In this case, we have taken this country India and its frontiers. Now India is a very powerful country. Regionally, we are a powerful country- we are powerful economically; we are very powerful culturally. I think you are mentioning soft power, that's culture really, and we are reasonably powerful militarily as well. So to a conventional India's frontiers attack are secured in the sense, unless you have somebody like the United States, but there is no one else by the way, not Russia, not Great Britain, nobody, only one power — the United States or China. China and the United States are the two countries today from whom we can not even dream of what we are referring to as "war". But the main threat today, therefore, to this country is not really military. In the component of struggle which leads to military confrontation- the main component today which can give rise to this type of a conflict is fundamentalism unfortunately and by an unfortunate coincidence of geography, we happen to be at the epicenter of fundamentalism spreading from this part of the country. Now India, even though I may say so, is genuinely democratic with all its faults. Democracy is the very messy process of government open to criticism all the time. Everyone will be criticized because everyone will make mistake. But we are, I think generally a functioning democracy with all the chaos that it entails. So we are genuinely secular. India is genuinely secular. Though there are people who when you listen to the media, particularly when your certain political parties are holding the meetings they say that there is thing, something that are wrong with them. But everyone except for the sake of argument will agree that we are a genuinely democratic and a genuinely secular. India is genuinely secular though there are people who

threat or the country is under threat, it cannot be so much from a military, that is highly unlikely. On the contrary, we are under threat from the spread of violent fundamentalism, that is our main threat and the answer to that cannot be military. It can be partially military. Military force is reauired or let us say armed force is required. It has to be met on the basis °ft~ount Of- ~o~t~e which doctrine must be as strong as the threat it seeks to concern. Now the threats to our country today are fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is based on religion. Primarily today, fundamentalism is more or less synonymous with religion. It is also associated with certain exponents of some political doctrines. I am referring specifically to what we in this country call LWE, Left Wing Extremism. They are also fanatics in their own way. But I like to feel them less fanatical than those whose major motivating force is religion. And to combat this or to oppose this type of fundamentalism, you will have to have a counter-doctrine; while you appply all the other instruments of state — diplomatic, security, economic. Whatever political confrontation you will have to have a counter healing doctrine which has to be sufficiently robust, sufficiently positive to counter a very strong fundamentalist threat. It is here that institutions like the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture have a very major role to perform because I think Swami Vivekananda's teachings, though they have been extensively published, extensively studied, extensively analyzed but they have been analyzed almost exclusively from a spiritual point of view. I think the time has come for institutes and institutions like this one and others to launch and assertive counter culture. Swami Vivekananda was a very positive and a muscular minded person and I think if the big institutions, the learned institutions, the galaxy of talent that we have — we have now to re-discover, re-analyze, re-examine Vivekananda's teachings in the context of contemporary strategy

and geo-politics. This is an aspect, I do not know how much studies being carried out on this. I think the time has come when Vivekananda's teachings have to be re- examined, re-analyzed, re-focused from various angles as to in the contemporary strategic and geo-political circumstances in the world.

Since I am talking about India's frontiers of this country to define some kind of an ideology but something to make this country stand up on its feet and face challenges with a brave front because India's frontiers are not only external they have become internal as well. That's a huge threat to us which we have to somehow find an answer too. As far as our frontiers are concerned, if you go around our frontiers, if you go around the map of India, which all of us remember, we have got an array of countries around our borders. A country is pondering how you look at it. They are either seven or eight if we include Afghanistan with whom we have no direct frontiers. But Pakistan, China, Burma, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, and of course the thing that we all tend to know- it's the elephant in the room, the Indian Ocean. It is the elephant in the room because no one talks about this. We only talk of this country and its periphery. India's frontier in time to come is going to be the Indian Ocean. India has in the very happy position or strategically, being in a position of strategic-geographical dominance of the Indian Ocean. Now whenever we talk of the Indian Ocean, there is mention of China and the "string of pearls" which as you know are the ports being built with the Chinese assistance in the country's round up periphery- Hambantota Gwadar, Sittwe, Shenzhen, Buman, Chittagong. But then we tend to overlook the fact geographically. This is particularly those who are from India will perhaps relate more to it. This huge mass of the Indian Peninsular that juts into the Indian Ocean provides you absolute dominance of the Indian Ocean. We don't need to have

"string of pearls". So we are actually rather apprehensive about nothing. As I said, we are very powerful at the middle level but we are climbing the stairs upwards. Our main threat is fundamentalism for which we have got to device a doctrine. Thus for example, just the other day the Hyderabad Bomb Blast took place. Many people lost their lives. This is the type of offensive that's coming on us. Every now and then it is happening. Where does it originate? Everyone points at one particular place until recently there was another discovery where lots of these explosions were also engineered by somebody else. So really speaking, we have got to have a very solid and a tight internal security system. And this will deliberat-6iy or perhaps not deliberately, they will impinge upon certain aspects of Civil Liberties, like the two young boys who picked up in Hyderabad on some suspicion. But there was no proof so they were let off. The problem is that is, is the nature of the problem. You have information from multiple sources but no legal proof. That is the dilemma, I think all of us face when we seek to concern this problem which is coming towards all of us. Our sea frontiers, as I said the elephant in the room the Indian Ocean is the main trade route- west to east, east to west. It's the main oil route. We are very fortunately placed in that respect. That is why, when a tiny country like the Maldives was facing so much trouble with the President Naseed, we were so concerned to this island country. Maldives is a very small island. It is situated very strategically. But the main threat is not its location. It is a fact that the recent troubles in Maldives have more than what attach as to the fundamentalist threat I was talking about. Again not fashionable to talk about it. People perhaps object, people who feel strongly about it, that is not a farce; so I am not mentioning the type of fundamentalism. But fundamentalism is creeping into the Maldives. I feel it is part of a deliberate rising tide if you like

which can all be traced back to sources in the neighborhood just across our border who are actively fermenting this tide of fundamentalism. Again this is a point of view which is contested by many in this country. They say that you are trying to hide your own deficiencies of which you have plenty. But you are trying to sweep everything under the carpet because you feel this is an external}l inspired threat. So India's frontiers have to be secured internally as well as externally.

And as far as the issue of International Understanding for Human Unity, I think it is absolutely apt. This should be taking place on the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. As I said we have a saying in Hindustani called *Sant Sipahi*, the saint and the soldier have much in common. And I think what I mentioned about Swamiji, he is a replica of a muscular saint. I think this is time that institutions re-examined, re-value, re-evaluate this aspect of his doctrine because I don't think when Swamiji was talking about spiritualism he was also at the same time exalting India to become free. It is no coincidence that when somebody says that India's freedom was fought non-violently that sounds perhaps three-quarters true or two-thirds true. It is true because there was a very substantial component of armed struggle. In India's struggles for freedom there is the substantial component which we tend to play down or by-pass. So Swamiji is a very good source of doctrinal inspiration to provide a philosophy for India, for the modern age and the present times. We should look into Swamiji's teachings in a more holistic manner. We have got to examine every nook and cranny, every word, every full stop, every comma — everything that is said, was significant. We have interpreted according to what we see, what we feel. We have not thought of several other aspects. So I think it is time that people got together and examined his doctrines. In the meanwhile as far as the frontiers of India are concerned, in very brief, we,

are militarily inviolable but internally also we have a lot of problems in the country, political problems of goverence which we have to face up to. You cannot show the melt- faced and the velvet-glove guite the separate things. To your external enemies the melt-faced but to your own people who are not agreeing with you, you have to use a velvet glove. You cannot use the melt-faced inside the country. That is I think we are going wrong that somewhere in what we are talking ab-9-u{ Chhattisgarh. We are going wrong there and I think some day we have, as you know very serious internal security problem right in the heart-land of the country. So I feel that got to be handled separately in a much more controlled and coordinated manner. We have to defend our frontiers externally as I said and internally as well. So with that I think I will finish my presentation.

So Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

# Eighth Academic Session

# Protecting the Ecological Integrity of a Fragile Planet

Debal Ray

Earth – the only planet that is the abode of human beings – has a finite limit within which it can tolerate stress on its biophysical system. Once we cross such limits, as it happened numerous times in the past due to geological reasons, the existing stable system will pass into an alternate stable system. Unfortunately, the alternate stable system may be entirely uninhabitable or undesirable from the anthropogenic point -of - view. This can be illustrated using the case study of Sahara. Palentological evidence indicates that it was a fertile grassland. It changed into its present state between 6000 and 1100 years ago. The trigger was a change in the Earth's orbit which affected the amount of solar insolation.

While triggers of change in the biophysical system of the Earth, in the geological past were geological events, almost all changes in the Earth's ecosystem since the invention of agriculture has been catalyzed by human being. Domestication of plants and animals at the expense of other species started the process of extinction through habitat modification. As time progressed, further modification in land surface was caused due to more intensive agriculture, human colonization, and industrialization. If the first wave of destruction to environment was triggered by the invention of agriculture about 13,000 years ago, the second blow came from Industrial Revolution about 250 years ago. An already fragmented, resource depleted Earth was now subjected to toxins in all spheres : water, air and soil. And in

most cases, record of the current level of toxins exceeded the tolerable endurable limit.

Key environmental processes that are particularly under stress include biodiversity loss, 'N' and 'P' cycle, land use change, freshwater use, stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change, ocean acidification, chemical pollution and aerosol loading. Out of these key parameters, the present status of a few processes is discussed here. Background extinction rate of species differs among taxa; but it ranges between 0.1 to1.0 species per million per year. The biosphere can tolerate upto 10 species extinction per million per year. The current rate of species extinction is more than 100 species per million per year. Clearly, the extinction rate has exceeded the threshold long back. The phosphorus flow into ocean was in the range of 1 million ton per year during the pre-industrial period. The maximum boundary determined by science is 12 million ton per year. The current flow of phosphorus is 10 million tons, which is within the limit but about to touch the threshold of limit.

The anthropogenic nitrogen removal from atmosphere increased from 0 million ton per year in pre-industrial period to 133 million ton per year at present. The safe limit of 39 million ton per year was crossed long ago. The stratospheric ozone depletion was a major concern in recent times – although the situation has improved a little recently. The pre-industrial value of stratospheric ozone was 290 Dobson unit which has changed to 283 Dobson units at present. The current value lies almost at the boundary of safe limit which is 276 Dobson unit. Climate change, as measured in terms of change in temperature, shows an alarming trend. The pre- industrial climate showed a stable temperature of 14.5°C. Following Industrial Revolution, the temperature increased by 0.74°C within this short period of time. The safe limit for the bio-climatic envelope has been calculated to

be 2°C above pre-industrial value. However, considering various Emission Scenarios (SRES), it won't take long before the safe limit is exceeded. A related concern is the acidification of the ocean. This is caused by the increase in partial pressure of $CO_2$ in air. The ocean acidification, measured as Aragonite saturation state in surface water, had a value of 3.44 Omega units in pre-industrial period the current value of ocean acidification is 2.90 Omega units and the safe boundary is 2.75 Omega units. Thus, considering the rapid $CO_2$ emission in the world, it may be deduced that the safe limit of ocean acidification will be fast exceeded. If that happens, there will be far reaching consequences on marine plants and animals including coral farming animals and shell farming animals.

Post World War II, there was a massive increase in the production of agricultural chemicals including insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. In 1962 and 1963, three books appeared that cautioned the general public about the adverse consequences of using these chemicals: Marry Commoner's *Science and Survival*, Murray Bookchin's *Our Synthetic Environment* and Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring*. Subsequent scientific research revealed that Chlorinated hydrocarbons, such as DDT, are not easily biodegradable, and can cause havoc in the ecosystem. This chemical attacks CNS of insects and causes reproductive failure in birds. Polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxin and heavy metals such as lead and mercury, on the other hand, are byproducts of industrial processes. These chemicals are instrumental in causing large-scale alteration of biosphere.

Another worrying manifestation of anthropogenic alteration of environment is accelerated species extinction. As already indicated, the current rate of species extinction – depending on taxa being considered – is 100 to 1000 times the background rate.

Some scientists believe that we are going through another mass extinction – one driven by human beings.

However, some scientists argue that mass extinction is a powerful creative force. The vacant niches created by mass extinction drive bursts of evolutionary creativity. However, such recovery period is excruciatingly long. The 5 million years after the end-Permian mass extinction were a pretty lousy time to be alive (even for snails), and the diversity of life in the seas did not begin to approach pre-extinction levels for tens of millions of years. A long time to wait. (Erwin, 2006)

Climate change has emerged as the latest and all pervading threat to human existence. Since the beginning of industrial civilization, concentration of green house gases, have increased uncontrollably, resulting in an increase in greenhouse effect in the globe. The climate change, according to most likely (IS92e) scenarios, is expected to cause large scale changes in the Earth's climate by 2000: rise of sea level by 50 cm, more intense hydrological cycle which translates into more severe flood and/or drought in some areas and less severe flood and/or drought in other places; reduction in strength of north Atlantic thermohaline circulation and widespread reduction in diurnal temperature.

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity before which this calamity can be prevented is very small. Scientific world widely believes that rise in temperature greater than 2 degree Celsius will cause irreversible damage to the biosphere. Countries of the world through a cocktail of approaches ranging from global (UNFCCC) to regional (BRICS) to national are evolving strategies for mitigation and adaptation. Without going into details of these strategies, it may be safely said that there is huge gap between what is required and what is being done.

For any given technology, preference structure and known resource base there are some utilization rates that cannot be

sustained. Drawing attention to these unsustainable rates is critical to informing decision makers and changing course towards sustainability. This will often require altering the pattern of preferences, the resource intensity of technologies or the relevant time horizon for different decisions. Since none of these is constant or stable over time, defining sustainability in a broader sense is not easy. According to World Development Report, 2003 - sustainable development needs to be based on principles that would apply to all issues whether they are classified as environmental, social, economic or any mix of the three (Giddings et al, 2002).

The ecological footprint analysis is often used to illustrate the unsustainability of present consumption choices. As a result of growing competition and demand for global resources, the world's population has reached a stage where the amount of resources needed to sustain it exceeds what is available (Global Environment Outlook 4, 2007). On a global level, humanity's footprint is 21.9 ha/person while the Earth's biological capacity is on the average, only 15.7 ha/person.(Footprint of Nations, 2005). On a regional scale however, there are profound differences in ecological footprint and biocapacity. The ecological footprint of Asia and Pacific, Europe (EU), Central & West Asia and North America exceeds their biocapacity by 0.6 ha, 2.64 ha, 2.0 ha and 3.71 ha respectively. On the other hand, the ecological footprint of Africa, Europe (Non EU), Latin America & Carribean are smaller than their biocapacity by 0.34ha, 0.32 ha and 3.42 ha respectively. The above analysis indicates that there is wide disparity in ecological footprint vis-à-vis biocapacity across the globe, with economically advanced nations having a footprint bigger than their biocapacity. More alarming is the finding that on a global scale also the ecological footprint can not be sustained as it vastly exceeds the biocapacity of earth.

I conclude by using a metaphor first described by Ehrlich and Ehrlich (1985)

*"as you walk from the terminal towards the airliner, you notice a man on a ladder busily prying rivets out of its wing. Somewhat concerned, you saunter over to the rivet popper and ask him just what the hell he's doing.*

*"I work for the airline – Growthmania Intercontinental", the man informs you, "and the airline has discovered that it can sell these rivets for two dollars a piece".*

*"But how do you know you won't fatally weaken the wing doing that?" you inquire.*

*"Don't worry," he assures you."I'm certain the manufacturer made this plane much stronger than it needs to be , so no harm's done. Besides, I've taken lots of rivets from this wing and it hasn't fallen off yet....."*

*You never have to fly on an airliner. But unfortunately, all of us are passengers on a very large spacecraft – one on which we have no option but to fly. And, frighteningly, it is swarming with rivet poppers behaving in ways analogous to that just described.'*

Solutions to existing environmental crises require implementation of well researched often-difficult choices. A homogeneous world unified by strong political will can only implement them. Without being exhaustive, some such solutions are listed below.

1. Assuming that species radiation is part of the evolutionary process, we may decide to scientifically choose areas that may be taken up on priority for conservation. Site congruence, which can be mapped easily, of many evolving lineage can then become the target of conservation activities.

2. Reserves should be as large as possible. All other things being equal, a single large reserve will conserve more species than several small reserves with the same total area.

Reserves should be close together. This should maximize chances for movements between reserves.

3. Precautionary Principle: Where there are credible threats of serious or irreversible damage to key environmental resources, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.(National Environment Policy, 2006)

4. Economic Efficiency: This Principle requires that the services of environmental resources be given economic value, and such value to count equally with the economic values of other goods and services, in analysis of alternative courses of action. If the costs (or benefits) of the externalities are not re-visited on the party responsible for the original act, the resulting level of the entire sequence of production or consumption, and externality, is inefficient. (National Environment Policy, 2006)

5. Entities with Incomparable Value: Significant risks to human health, life, and environmental life-support systems, besides certain other unique natural and man-made entities, which may impact the well-being, broadly conceived, of large numbers of persons, may be considered as "Incomparable" in that individuals or societies would not accept these risks for compensation in money or conventional goods and services. A conventional economic cost-benefit calculation would not, accordingly, apply in their case, and such entities would have priority in allocation of societal resources for their conservation without consideration of direct or immediate economic benefit.(National Environment Policy, 2006).

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# Protecting Our Little Planet

Hirak Ghose

How big is our planet? To the primitive man, the Earth appeared to be a flat ground with the sky overhead meeting it on all sides. As he moved forward, the horizon receded before him and he might have come upon the shore of an ocean. He had no idea where this flat Earth ended. He was buffeted by the forces of nature and felt his insignificance in the vastness of mother Earth. It took a great deal of reasoning for him to conclude that the Earth was not flat but was spherical in shape. A Greek astronomer tried to determine the size of the sphere by an experiment. He noted the difference in the angle formed by the sun at midday at summer solstice at two places-one on the tropic of cancer and the other some 500 miles north of it- by the shadow cast by a stick and worked out the circumference of the Earth. His figure of 25,000 miles was remarkably accurate; but his contemporaries found it too large to imagine. A lower figure of 18,000 miles ascribed by later astronomers was reluctantly accepted. Incidentally, this lower figure led Columbus to believe that it would be possible for him to sail to India by a western route and he found America instead. The point to note is that even as man is able to grapple with the actual dimensions of the Earth intellectually or at a practical level, at the emotional level the Earth remains too large for his senses to comprehend. Man has progressed far in knowledge and technology. Some of his own actions reach every corner of the Earth and have profound long term effects. But he still instinctively believes that the Earth is big enough to meet his extravagant demands on resources and not be

damaged by his indiscriminate action. Should matters ever come to a head, he hopes, his ingenuity and technology will save him.

Man's greatest impact is where he lives, namely, his environment. He is unique in being both a creature and a moulder of his environment. He has made his temporary or permanent abode virtually everywhere on the land mass of the Earth and in some places even on water. He tries to make his life easier whatever his circumstances. He has cleared forests, built houses and settlements, engaged in agriculture, irrigated his fields and raised the yield of his crop. Changes have come thick and fast after the industrial revolution. He has been continually interacting with his environment, sometimes harmoniously but often antagonistically. When the means to achieve his objectives were small, he merely scratched the surface of the Earth and made no lasting impact. The applications of modern science and technology since the 18th century have, however, brought about a sea change in his life and the environment he lives in.

If we look back at the history of Europe which has led the world in material progress, we see three major movements, running parallelly and reinforcing one another. These are (i) Agricultural Revolution and (iii) Industrial Revolution and (iii) Advances in health and medical treatment...all backed by science and technological innovations.

The agricultural revolution began with scientific selection and rotation of crops in order to maintain and improve the fertility of land as well as the introduction of new crops such as potato and corn. The progress in science and industry also led to the invention of new farm machinery, chemical fertilizers, improved seeds and better farming practices. The productivity of land, thus, improved continuously. The cultivation of science and the progress in industries, on the other hand, depended on the

increase in food production and the release of excess farm labour to the industry, creating a virtuous cycle.

Scientific studies too had far reaching consequences in the field of health. The causes of diseases were discovered, and vaccines, chemical drugs, and later, antibiotics were invented. In fact, the entire range of medical sciences made tremendous strides resulting in a continuous increase in man's longevity. The world population that in the past had been held in check by shortage of food, epidemics and war, *reached one billion for the first time in 1804*. It has continued to rise since then and is now over 7 billion. Although the growth has lately decelerated, again through scientific means and not natural causes, the population would, by the current trends, reach 9 billion by 2050 and may stabilize perhaps at over 10 billion by 2080.

The flip side of the coin of the unprecedented growth in population, and also prosperity, in some parts of the world is the cost that the earth has to bear. Meeting the basic needs of the increasing population, and, as importantly, the demand for material prosperity, has placed an enormous strain on global resources. Mahatma Gandhi had said with great prescience that…"God forbid that India should take to industrialization after the manner of the West…It took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will a country like India require?" Every country has, however, taken the Western route to development, through intensive agriculture, industrialization and urbanization, whose consequences on the resources and the environment of the world have begun to unfold.

*Exhaustion of natural resources and damage to the ecosystem and environmental disasters: Today, we are faced with the prospect of exhaustion of important irreplaceable resources such as oil and even fresh water*: Large proportions

of the world's fish stocks have already been over-fished, some perhaps terminally. Thousands of species are disappearing every day as a result of pollution, over-harvesting, habitat destruction and other human activities. Bio-diversity is important for us not only for our quest for knowledge but our physical well-being, for it provides us with a healthy environment and sources for food, medicines and many other useful products.

An example of a major breakdown of the ecological system is the great inland lake, the Aral Sea. During the 60's and 70's water was diverted for irrigation of cotton fields from the Amu Darya and the Sir Darya which fed the Aral Sea. By 2007, 90% of the lake had dried. The receding waters had left behind miles of salty, man-made desert. The unique wildlife of the delta had disappeared. Water had become salty and polluted with fertilizers and pesticides, causing alarming increases in birth defects, miscarriages, kidney damage and cancer.

Similarly, the Lake Chad in Africa which was one of largest fresh water lakes in the world had shrunk to 5% of its expanse between 1963 and 1998 on account of over-grazing, inefficient irrigation and shifting climate patterns.

The run-off loaded with chemicals from the farms of central United States has turned the Gulf of Mexico into almost a dead sea. In many parts of India chemicals from farms have leached into even deep aquifers.

**Agents of damage to the environment:** The industrial revolution was the result of mechanization of the means of production powered by burning coal. It enabled mass production of goods at a low cost and brought about significant improvements in the living conditions of the common man. However, large scale production also meant an increase in pollution from industries, towns that sprang as a result of industrialization, transportation of people and goods and intensive

agriculture. The trend towards greater industrialization, urbanization as well as intensive agriculture has continued at an increasing pace.

By pollution, we mean, chemical or radioactive substances or energy such as noise, heat or light, that cause adverse changes in the natural environment. In the air, pollution comprises particulate matter (indicated by size:PM10-PM2.5) and gases such as carbon monoxide, $SO_2$, NOx, released by power plants, factories and motor vehicles etc. NOx and hydrocarbons react to sunlight to produce photochemical ozone and smog. In soil, contaminants such as hydrocarbons, heavy metals, pesticides are released through spills and leakage. Water pollution is caused by the discharge of waste water from commercial and industrial waste, untreated domestic sewage, release of other contaminants and waste as well as urban and agricultural run-offs, into surface water. Contaminants also leach into aquifers.

The world woke up to the danger of pollution in the 1960s. Rachel Carson, in her book the Silent Spring, documented how the presence of DDT increased as one went up the food chain and affected animal life, and warned against indiscriminate use of pesticides. The first world summit on environment took place in Stockholm in 1972 and led to greater public awareness and legislative and institutional changes throughout the world.

**Effects of pollution:** Pollution is generally a silent killer as its effect is felt over a period of time. However, once a critical level of pollution has been reached, it may have immediate consequences and lead to environmental disasters.

Acid rain has been a recurrent feature in industrialized countries. It means rain or other forms of precipitation such as snow, fog or hail that contain elevated levels hydrogen ions and are unusually acidic. They are caused by sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen reacting with water molecules in the

atmosphere. These pollutants are released by electrical power stations (burning sulphur rich coal), factories and motor vehicles (releasing NOx). Though acid rain was noticed as far back as in 1853 in Britain, its frequency and intensity has increased over time. It has harmful effects on plants, aquatic animals and infrastructure. Many lakes in New England have become acidic and unable to support fish life. Forests in Europe have died. There have been belated efforts in stemming the emissions of these pollutants.

Chemical industries have caused occupational diseases and grave environmental disasters in different parts of the world. A particularly serious neurological syndrome called Minamata disease was discovered in 1956. It was caused by a mercury compound released with waste water by a chemical plant into the Minamata Bay in Japan during 1932-68. People ate shell fish and fish from the bay, which had bio-accumulated high levels of mercury. By 2001, over seventeen hundred people had died from the disease. Mercury poisoning was, however, known before. The hatter in *Alice in Wonderland* was mad probably because he had tanned leather with mercury as was the practice.

Another example of chemical disaster is the Love Canal in the USA in which chemicals were dumped over years and the land fill was used for housing. The residents suffered a high incidence of cancer.

Chemical industries are also prone to 'major accidents'. Uncontrolled runaway reactions in chemical plants have caused great losses of lives, debilitating diseases and long lasting poisoning of land and water. In one of the worst tragedies that occurred, over 3700 persons died and over 5.5 lac suffered injuries following a leakage of methyl isocyanate and other toxic chemicals from the Union Carbide's pesticide plant in Bhopal on 3rd December,1984. The transport of hazardous chemicals and oil

has also caused losses to life, property and environment in various parts of the world. There have also been numerous spills from oil rigs in the seas.

The greatest environmental danger facing mankind today is climate change. It is caused by the emission of green house gases, notably carbon dioxide and methane, from industry and agriculture. The release of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) into the atmosphere, apart from contributing to the green house effect, has also caused a hole in the ozone layer around the earth with immediate consequences on the health of people.

**Evidence of global warming**: Climate change owing to the increase in the green house gases in the atmosphere released by human activities is no longer a hypothesis but a proven theory. The earth's surface temperature has risen by about half a degree since 1975. Globally, the ten hottest years on record have all been in the past 15 years. The temperature rises have already caused substantial loss of ice in Greenland and scientists fear that in the years to come the Arctic would become ice free in summer. The snows on the top of Kilimanjaro have all but disappeared.

8.3.2 **Future effects of climate change :** As the temperature rises, it would cause a broad range of impacts. Glaciers and polar ice packs would melt. Perennial rivers fed by glaciers would dry up in summer but cause flooding during rains on account of the dwindling of forest cover and erosion of soil. Thermal expansion of sea water and the partial melting of glaciers and ice packs would raise the sea levels. With a rise of 3-4 degrees in temperature, low lying coastal areas in Bangladesh, Vietnam and islands in the Pacific and Maldives would go under water. Coastal cities like New York, London, Tokyo, Cairo or even Calcutta would be threatened. Heat waves would be more frequent and intense. Droughts and wildfires would occur more often. In general, weather would become unpredictable.

The University of Texas has carried out an extensive statistical analysis of the behaviour of a wide range of plants and animal species in North America and Europe. The study showed that species such as birds, butterflies and alpine herbs had shifted their habitat northward on an average of 6 kilometers per decade or to higher altitudes of 6 metres per decade. It also found that migratory birds, amphibian and other animals had been breeding and flowers blooming earlier in spring. As habitat changes or is destroyed, species will be pushed to extinction.

An analysis of the factors adversely affecting environment shows that in industrialized countries they are related to urbanization, industrialization and mass production and in general, unthinking use of technology. In developing countries, on the other hand, the increase in population and poverty are more important factors. Over-exploitation of natural resources on account of these factors leads to degradation of soil, desertification, accumulation of wastes, depletion of water resources and urban squalor. According to the Johannesburg Declaration (2002), more than one billion people presently lack access to clean drinking water, and two billion people lack access to proper sanitation. The lack of clean water and sanitation is blamed for causing more than three quarters of diseases. [*In other words, poverty is both the cause and the effect of environmental problems*]. The developing world is caught up in a vicious circle... on the one hand, poverty must be eradicated to improve environment and on the other hand, the process of removal of poverty may foul the air, the land and the water.

**Sustainable development**: The **Brundtland Commission** (1987) advocated **sustainable development** as a solution to the contrary pulls of environment and development. It defined sustainable development as development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations

to meet their own needs.' The Commission's report was followed by the international agreements at the Rio Earth summit in 1992 and the Johannesburg summit in 2002.

An important way to proceed on the path of sustainable growth is to (i) reduce energy demands; (ii) increase the efficiency of energy use technology; (iii) shift to cleaner fuels and renewable energy sources, namely, hydel, solar, wind, thermal and biomass. Another area which requires as much attention is the grip of a use and throw away culture in consumer behaviour and industrial production.

I would briefly discuss these vital remedial measures.

**(i) Reducing Energy demand:** How do we reduce energy demands without sacrificing development? There are many ways of doing this. First, we can reduce transmission and distribution losses of electricity. India loses as much as 22% of the electric energy (as against China's and the USA's 6%) on account of these factors.

Secondly, buildings are a major user of natural resources in the West. In 2006, buildings consumed 40% of the total consumption of energy in both the US and the EU. We are unfortunately blindly following the western architectural system. We could easily use our abundant sunlight by having skylights to light our buildings during daytime as we used to, or heat the water for cooking, washing and bathing. It costs only a little extra money but requires forethought at the stage of designing a building to use solar energy. One can also examine the setting of our standard time to make greater use of daylight hours.

Better roads and control of traffic reduce the consumption of fuel. (Calcutta is a poor example on both these points).Moreover, despite having an extensive network of railways, we have been increasingly relying on road transport. In

general, individual transportation has gained precedence over mass transportation. These trends need to be reversed.

Imaginative city planning can save considerable energy. A study made at the Cambridge University showed that more than half the total energy use is related in some way to spatial structure the relative location of homes, jobs and shopping sites. The zoning of residential areas, schools and workplaces should not be done mechanically and thought should be given to minimizing daily travel. IT now makes it possible to work from home and many organizations are adapting their work practices accordingly.

(ii) Increasing the efficiency of energy use technology: There is considerable scope to modernize plant and equipment and improve energy efficiency. We still use Edison's incandescent bulbs although more efficient light sources, namely, compact fluorescent lamps and Lighting Emitting Diodes (LED) lamps are already in the market. We could leapfrog from kerosene to high tech cutting costs all around. Besides, one should without further delay phase out the oil guzzling automobiles and insist on cleaner and more energy efficient vehicles on the road. It is heartening to note that prior to the Copenhagen summit in 2009, India announced that it would reduce its carbon emission intensity by 20-25% by 2020 from the 2005 level. China had also earlier announced a reduction of the index by 40%.

**(iii) Clean energy**: The main sources of renewable energy are (i) hydro-electricity (ii) solar (iii) wind (iv) geo-thermal (v) tidal and (vi) bio-mass. These, generally, make better use of natural resources and are environment friendly. Unlike today's huge power plants, the generation of energy from many types of renewable sources can be decentralized leading to various kinds of economies and benefits to the environment.

Rapidly industrializing countries such as China and India, have huge coal reserves. It is not practical to stop using coal. Clean coal technology is, however, being developed whereby emissions of NOx, $SO_2$ and particulate matter may be controlled.

Finally, we should look at energy from biomass. We have the largest population of cattle in the world. We need to develop efficient ways of producing and delivery of biogas on a large scale. *Khatals* could produce biogas and organic fertilizers. Methane should also be tapped from municipal land fill sites.

***Throw away society, and growth at all costs***: As mentioned earlier, ours has become a use and throw away society. Industry is based now on the concept of planned obsolescence. It makes minor changes in products and reduces the older products to junk by stopping the production of spare parts. Unfortunately, we are building our economy on the basis of production and consumption without regard to the wastage of resource and pollution. An environmentally friendly regime should instead focus on waste reduction and reusing and recycling of materials.

Our grandmothers rarely discarded anything. Our mantra should be: Reduce, Repair, Re-use and Recycle. We should recycle used products, such as those made of aluminium, steel or paper, thereby making considerable saving of energy, raw materials and water. The recycling of aluminium takes only 5% of the energy required to produce the virgin metal which is itself a highly energy intensive process. Making of paper from recycled material reduces air pollution by 74% and water pollution by 35%. It also saves the proportionate amount of forest from being felled. Further, we should ensure the use of waste as raw material for a new product. The law can encourage the process by imposing an extended responsibility on the producer to take care of pollution from the cradle to the grave of a product. It is also time that the economists gave up their blind dependence on

GDP and devised a better index of development and well being of people.

ADAPTATION MEASURES: Scientists recognise that even if we implement the most ambitious mitigation measures, we cannot wholly escape global warming. Many parts of the world would suffer from rising temperatures, increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather events, decreased water availability, changes in crop productivity, loss of biodiversity and sea level rise. These direct impacts would have severe knock-on effects on health, mortality, food security, migration patterns, natural ecosystem and economic prosperity, at both local and global levels.

We must sooner rather than later brace ourselves to take measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change. We should aim to reduce the risk of negative impacts and to maximize any opportunities that might arise. Adaptive measures will include building sea walls, irrigation facilities, breeding seeds that are resistant to heat, drought, salt, insect and disease through genetic manipulation. Genetic manipulation may also help to exploit the beneficial effects of CO2 enhancement on crop growth and water use.

I shall end by briefly mentioning the international agreements to protect the planet by curbing the generation of green house gases and ozone depleting substances. It does not matter where green house gases originate; their effect is felt globally. And hence international cooperation is essential.

(i) **International agreements**: The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). Its aim is to reduce emissions of green house gases to a level that would bring to a halt climate change due to anthropogenic factors. The Convention recognizes 'Common but differentiated responsibilities' of all countries for reducing green

house gas emissions. The industrialized countries which account for most of the accumulated emission of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, have a greater responsibility and capacity to reduce their current emissions. The Kyoto Protocol (1997) specified legally binding commitments for them to reduce their collective greenhouse gas emissions by at least 5 percent below the 1990 levels by the period 2008-2012. The US which contributed 25% of the GHG emissions remains a non-signatory to the Protocol. The Conferences of Parties to the UNFCC which now take place annually in December have seen a major conflict between the developed and the developing countries. The former countries were never happy with the mandatory obligation to cut their emissions under the Kyoto protocol while emerging economies like those of China, India, Brazil and South Africa were free to increase their fossil fuel consumption. China has now, in fact, overtaken the USA in Green Hona Gas (GHG) emissions and India has taken the third place. A compromise was reached at the Doha Climate Summit (COP 13) in 2012. The Kyoto Protocol was extended up to 2020. It also agreed to put in place a new comprehensive agreement under the UNFCCC by 2015, which would impose an obligation on all countries to curb GHG emissions in 2020. Canada, however, dropped out of the Kyoto Protocol. The US has remained out of its purview. Russia, Japan and New Zealand made no commitment on reduction of emission. Though much weakened, the Protocol would still provide a framework for future action on climate including certain important measures on adaptation and compensation.

In this somewhat bleak landscape, there is an untold success story. Thanks to the compliance with the Montreal Protocol to phase out CFCs, the ozone hole over the Antarctic appears to have stabilized. It provides a glimmer of hope that man will realize before it is too late that he is a member of one human

family and that he has to summon up the will to change his ways and share the burden equitably instead of caviling at the extent of sacrifice that a country would accept.

I may enter a few caveats at the conclusion. I have not mentioned the part played by the NGOs in protecting the environment. I have omitted any discussion on the effects of war or testing of nuclear weapons on the environment. The discussion on chemical industry may give the impression that it must be shunned.This would be a wrong approach. I have also not talked about nuclear energy. Modern life is impossible without chemicals and energy. The concerns of safety and health must be addressed properly in these essential industries.

# Closing (Ninth) Academic Session

# Swami Vivekananda As a Socio-Economic Thinker

Swami Tyagarupananda

I have been teaching economics as a subject at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir for about twenty-five years. Microeconomics, macroeconomics— even development economics and Indian economics offered in our universities liberally use Western economic models based on the historical settings of countries like America and England. One of the core assumptions in much of the economic literature is that of 'profit maximization' or 'sales maximization'. Examples used in micro and macro textbooks inevitably use American firms and industries. A thought has often crossed my mind— how much of these theories are suited to our country, to a vast democracy with a rich heritage of its own, fundamentally distinct from say, America or England? Can we explain the basic economic theories, micro-economics and macro-economics, based on the empirical evidence of our country, India? What indeed should be the mindset of such a theoretician who would be deeply patriotic and respectful to the Indian experience and yet well-versed with the analytical rigour that formal 'economics' has on offer?

Swami Vivekananda was no armchair sociologist or economist. He was a person who had travelled, often on foot through all the major states of the country-- first during the period 1883-1893 and later in 1897 on his return from the West after the Chicago Parliament. It was his first-hand experience of the masses that combined with his knowledge of the then prevalent

socio-economic theories that shaped his vision of the country. In his historic address at Madras in 1897, he had spoken about 'root and branch reform'. To the social reformers of the period, he had stressed on three qualities:

First, the heart is to feel. Do they feel, he exhorted that the masses in the country were living the life of brutes? Does this feeling for the oppressed course their veins, till they almost become mad?

Second, a concrete plan must be in order to redress the condition of the poor and downtrodden. There must be some realistic plan which would aim at alleviating the condition of the distressed.

Third, tremendous perseverance is necessary to execute the plans. In spite of opposition within the country and without, one must have steely nerves to be able to serve the bitter pill. Any social change will require sacrifice but that would not come easily.

At the core of Vivekananda's philosophy lies Vedanta philosophy. However, Vedanta is no longer a tool for individual *mukti* (emancipation) rather it has borne the seed of a sociological revolution in the doctrine of selfless service to humanity. During his travels in India and the West, Swamiji had interacted with men and women from different walks of life—kings, industrialists, philanthropists, artists, litterateurs and from all of them, he had imbibed a vast outlook towards life, radically different from the one that is usually associated with Indian monks.

Vivekananda's views on the state: In his book *East & West* (Prachya O Paschatya), he had written— "Society began to be formed and it varied according to different countries. Those who lived on the sea-shore mostly earned their livelihood by fishing in the sea, those on the plains by agriculture. The mountaineers kept

large flocks of sheep, and the dwellers in the desert tended goats and camels. Others lived in the forests and maintained themselves by hunting. The dwellers on the plain learnt agriculture; their struggle for existence became less keen; they had time for thought and culture, and thus became more and more civilised...The hunter, the shepherd, the fisherman turned robbers or pirates whenever food became scarce and plundered the dwellers in the plains. These, in their turn, united themselves in bands of large numbers for the common interest of self-preservation; and thus little kingdoms began to be formed...Gradually each party gained in numbers and became stronger and stronger; millions of Devas were united, and so were millions of Asuras. Violent conflicts and fighting went on, and along with them, the intermingling of these two forces.From the fusion of these different types and races our modern societies, manners, and customs began to be evolved..." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,Vol.5, pp. 523-524)

As Santwana Dasgupta rightly concludes, in Swamiji's the origin of the state and the society was not base on a pact, but a contract that was the result of a gradual evolution. Rousseau, Locke and Hobbes had spoken about such a contract. On the other hand, authors like Hume, Burke and Greene had opposed such a theory, their argument focusing on the fact that there is no empirical evidence to support such a central contract.

In the same book *East & West* (Prachya O Paschatya) he goes on to add the following words about consumers, producers, middlemen and the like—

"...One class of men went on manufacturing articles of utility and comfort, either by manual or intellectual labour. A second class took upon themselves the charge of protecting them, and all proceeded to exchange these things. And it so happened that a band of fellows who were very clever undertook to take these

things from one place to another and on the plea of remuneration for this, appropriated the major portion of their profit as their due. One tilled the ground, a second guarded the produce from being robbed, a third took it to another place and a fourth bought it. The cultivator got almost nothing; he who guarded the produce took away as much of it as he could by force; the merchant who brought it to the market took the lion's share; and the buyer had to pay out of all proportion for the things, and smarted under the burden! The protector came to be known as the king; he who took the commodities from one place to another was the merchant. These two did not produce anything— but still snatched away the best part of things and made themselves fat by virtually reaping most of the fruits of the cultivator's toil and labour. The poor fellows who produced all these things had often to go without his meals and cry to God for help!" (C.W. Vol.5, pp. 524-525)

The above view of Swamiji is akin to the Marxian view of the exploitation of the proletariat, of the bourgeoisie claiming a large share of the produce without helping in its production. Some similarities have often drawn comparison between Swami Vivekananda and Karl Marx. However, Marx was a materialist while Swami Vivekananda believed in the supremacy of the *Atman*. Vivekananda was for the emancipation of the individual while Marx stressed on the supremacy of the society. Individual predilections had to be sacrificed at the altar of the state, which would emerge from withering of the classes and the rise of the proletariat.

In the book *Modern India* (Bartaman Bharat), Swami Vivekananda's analytical acumen in social and political phenomenon reaches its highest pitch. The history of India has seen the rise of the intelligentsia (the Brahmanas) and the military and the administrators (the Kshatriyas). With the advent of the

British traders, India witnessed the rise of the merchant class (Vaishyas). The class of industrialists had heralded the Industrial Revolution in Europe. This along with the Renaissance in the Middle Ages laid the foundations of the enlightened West. In course of time exploitation of the working class(the proletariat, the Sudras) became an important feature of the rise of capitalism that spread its wings beyond Europe into all the different continents. With the spread of liberal education, even among the masses, the consciousness about rights became prominent. It is in this context that the socialist and communistic movements started in the 19th century, reaching a climax in the Bolshevik Revolution in Soviet Russia in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin. Let us turn to Swamiji's analysis of the interplay of the caste (class) forces in India.

The role of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas:

"The Vedic priests base their superior strength on the knowledge of the sacrificial Mantras.... The kings as well as their subjects are, therefore, looking up to these priests for their welfare during their earthly life...Now commanding the king to be engaged in affairs fraught with death and ruin, now standing by him as his fastest friend with kind and wise counsels, now spreading the net of subtle, diplomatic statesmanship in which the king is easily caught— the priest is seen, oftentimes, to make the royal power totally subservient to him..." (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 438)

"To protect the State, to meet the expenses of the personal comforts and luxuries of himself and his long retinue, and, above all, to fill to overflowing the coffers of the all-powerful priesthood for its propitiation, the king is continually draining the resources of his subjects, even as the sun sucks up moisture from the earth..." (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 439)

"...perpetual struggle for supremacy between the priestly and the royal classes, which began from the Vedic times and

continued through ages till it reached its climax at the time of the Jain and Buddhist revolutions, has ceased for ever. Now these two mighty powers are friendly to each other; but neither is there any more that glorious Kshatra (warlike) valour of the kings, nor that spiritual brilliance which characterised the Brahmins; each has lost its former intrinsic strength…" (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 444)

Education as the main instrument of upliftment of the lower caste:

"...It is never possible for the people to acquire any sort of education by which they can learn to combine among themselves and be united for the accomplishment of any object for the common good of the people, or by which they can have the concerted intellect or conceive the idea of popular right in the treasures collected by the king from his subjects, or even such education by which they can be fired with the aspiration to gain the right of representation in the control of state revenues and expenditure.Why should they do such things? Is not the inspiration of the Rishi responsible for their prosperity and progress..." (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 44)

'....The voice of the ruled in the government of their land—which is the watchword of the modern Western world, and of which the last expression has been echoed with a thundering voice in the Declaration of the American Government, in the words, "That the government of the people of this country must be by the people and for the good of the people"—cannot however be said to have been totally unrecognised in ancient India. The Greek travellers and others saw many independent small States scattered all over this country, and references are also found to this effect in many places of the Buddhistic literature. And there cannot be the least doubt about it that the germ of self-government was at least present in the shape of the village Panchayat, which is still to be found in existence in many

places of India. But the germ remained for ever the germ; the seed though put in the ground never grew into a tree. This idea of self-government never passed beyond the embryo state of the village Panchayat system and never spread into society at large' (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 442)

"I have stated previously that the four castes, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra do, in succession, rule the world. During the period of supreme authority exercised by each of these castes, some acts are accomplished which conduce to the welfare of the people, while others are injurious to them." (C.W. Vol.4, p.452)

The advent of foreign rulers in India:

"The resuscitation of the priestly power under the Mussulman rule was, on the other hand, an utter impossibility. The Prophet Mohammed himself was dead against the priestly class in any shape and tried his best for the total destruction of this power by formulating rules and injunctions to that effect. Under the Mussulman rule, the king himself was the supreme priest; he was the chief guide in religious matters; and when he became the emperor, he cherished the hope of being the paramount leader in all matters over the whole Mussulman world...Crushing the Brahminical supremacy under his feet, the Mussulman king was able to restore to a considerable extent the lost glories of such dynasties of emperors as the Maurya, the Gupta, the Andhra, and the Kshatrapa...In this manner, after an age-long play of action and reaction between these two forces, the final victory of the royal power was echoed on the soil of India for several centuries, in the name of foreign monarchs professing an entirely different religion from the faith of the land. But at the end of this Mohammedan period, another entirely new power made its appearance on the arena and slowly began to assert its prowess in the affairs of the Indian world." (C.W. Vol. 4, pp. 445-448)

The merchant class, its rise under the English:

"This power is so new, its nature and workings are so foreign to the Indian mind, its rise so inconceivable, and its vigour so insuperable that though it wields the suzerain power up till now, only a handful of Indians understand what this power is. We are talking of the occupation of India by England...that a handful of Vaishyas (traders) who, despite their great wealth,...would unite, cross for purposes of business rivers and seas, would, solely by virtue of their intelligence and wealth, by degrees make puppets of the long established Hindu and Mohammedan dynasties; not only so, but that they would buy as well the services of the ruling powers of their own country and use their valour and learning as powerful instruments for the influx of their own riches--this is a spectacle entirely novel to the Indians..." (C.W. Vol.4, pp. 448-449)

"...from a careful study of the history of the world, it appears that in conformity to the law of nature the four castes, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra do, in every society, one after another in succession, govern the world...Among the modern Western nations, with England at their head, this power of controlling society has been, for the first time, in the hands of the Vaishyas or mercantile communities, made rich through the carrying on of commerce." (C.W. Vol.4, pp. 449-450)

"Therefore the conquest of India by England...whose war flag is the factory chimney, whose troops are the merchant men, whose battlefields are the market-places of the world, and whose Empress is the shining Goddess of Fortune herself! It is on this account I have said before that it is indeed an unseen novelty, this conquest of India by England. What new revolution will be effected in India by her clash with the new giant power, and as the result of that revolution what new transformation is in store

for future India, cannot be inferred from her past history." (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 452)

Modern theories for upliftment of the poor:

"...Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism, and other like sects are the vanguard of the social revolution that is to follow. As the result of grinding pressure and tyranny, from time out of mind, the Shudras, as a rule, are either meanly servile...or otherwise are as inhuman as brute beasts..." (C.W. Vol.4, pp. 468-469)

The dilemma in the Indian society:

'On one side, new India is saying, "What the Western nations do is surely good, otherwise how did they become so great?" On the other side, old India is saying, "The flash of lightning is intensely bright, but only for a moment; look out, boys, it is dazzling your eyes. Beware!

Have we not then to learn anything from the West? Must we not need to try and exert ourselves for better things? Are we perfect? Is our society entirely spotless, without any flaw? There are many things to learn, he must struggle for new and higher things till we die--struggle is the end of human life. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "As long as I live, so long do I learn." That man or that society which has nothing to learn is already in the jaws of death. Yes, learn we must many things from the West: but there are fears as well.' (C.W. Vol. 4. p. 477)

"O India, this is your terrible danger. The spell of imitating the West is getting such a strong hold upon you that what is good or what is bad is no longer decided by reason, judgement, discrimination, or reference to the Shastras. Whatever ideas, whatever manners the white men praise or like are good; whatever things they dislike or censure are bad. Alas! what can be a more tangible proof of foolishness than this?"(C.W. Vol. 4, p. 478)

"O India! With this mere echoing of others, with this base imitation of others, with this dependence on others, this slavish

weakness, this vile detestable cruelty--wouldst thou, with these provisions only, scale the highest pinnacle of civilization and greatness? Wouldst thou attain, by means of thy disgraceful cowardice, that freedom deserved only by the brave and the heroic?" (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 479)

Say, "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother." Thou, too, clad with but a rag round thy loins proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice: "The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God. India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age." Say, brother: "The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good," and repeat and pray day and night, "O Thou Lord of Gauri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O Thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a Man!" (C.W. Vol. 4. p. 480)

# Selfishness and Economic Wellbeing

Abhirup Sarkar

## Selfishness, Efficiency and Inequality

Neo-classical economics, which has been dominating mainstream economic thinking for almost two centuries, has two basic tenets. Firstly, it recognizes the individual, rather than any class, creed or caste, as the central decision-making unit taking important economic decisions. Secondly, the typical individual is assumed to be a selfish entity who is concerned primarily with the pursuit of self interest. One would have imagined that the simultaneous pursuits of selfish interests by a large number of individuals would lead to feuds, disharmony and chaos. Yet, quite contrary to the apparent, Neo-classical economics proposes that such pursuits of self interest, simultaneously by a large number of individuals, would help society to attain a state of harmony and 'efficiency'. The proposition, which lies at the core of modern economics and serves as a foundation for pro free market economic thought, is put forward in the form of two mathematical theorems, and appropriately called the First and the Second Fundamental Theorems of Welfare Economics. To facilitate subsequent discussion it is necessary to understand in plain language what these theorems claim and what they cannot.

The basic mechanism through which a large number of selfish individuals are envisaged to jointly build up a harmonious economy is competition. The pressure of competition, along with the pursuit of self interest, is supposed to bring out the best each individual in which, in turn, benefits society. Again, the institution through which competition works for benefit of society is the

market where individuals can freely buy and sell produced commodities as well as non-produced factors of production like labour. The First Fundamental Theorem of Welfare Economics tells us that when individuals trade freely in an environment of competition, the outcome is 'efficient'. Here the term 'efficient' means 'best' or something that cannot be improved upon. More specifically, an efficient outcome is one where no single individual can be made better off without making at least one other individual worse off. This notion of efficiency is called Pareto Efficiency, being named after the nineteenth century Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals that the First Theorem does not put up much defense in favour of selfish economic behaviour and free markets. Let us see why.

Pareto Efficiency does not rule out outcomes which are extremely skewed and undesirable from an ethical point of view. To take an example, suppose the free market exchange results in an allocation where ninety percent of the wealth in the economy is concentrated in the hands of the richest one percent of the population and the remaining ninety nine percent of the population enjoys only one per cent of the wealth. The outcome would still be Pareto Efficient as long as redistribution of a small amount of wealth from the richest one percent to the rest hurts the former as would be the case if all individuals, including the rich, are selfish. Clearly such an outcome would be unacceptable by any moral or ethical standard. Pareto Efficiency of the free market outcome only tells us that the allocation of income or wealth in a free market economy will not be inefficient, that is starting with this free market allocation it will not be possible to make some individuals better off without making any one else worse off through any redistribution. But this does not rule out disagreeable outcomes as the one stated above.

The Second Welfare Theorem seems to have more bite than the first. Suppose society notionally arrives at an ideal allocation

of wealth among its members. Theoretically, there may be various paths of achieving this allocation, including that of socialism. What the Second Welfare Theorem assures us is that whatever other ways may exist to implement the ideal, the free market mechanism is certainly a feasible way of getting to the desired allocation as long as the desired allocation is Pareto Efficient. Since Pareto efficiency is a feature all desired allocations should have, one might be tempted to conclude that a free market economy inhabited by selfish individuals can achieve whatever outcome it suits best through the market mechanism.

Unfortunately, the conclusion would be pre-mature. Indeed, the theorem is valid only under certain crucial assumptions. On carefully looking at the Theorem it transpires that selfish behaviour and the market mechanism, taken together, is capable of implementing *any* desired allocation which is Pareto Efficient provided we are freely allowed to *redistribute* the initial wealth of the individuals. More specifically, if society is very unequal to begin with, in terms of wealth, education or access to technology, then it is not possible to reach a state of complete equality through the market. In other words the pursuit of self interest would deliver a desired outcome if the society is not very unequal.

There is yet another basic requirement for selfishness to perform through the market. This is the requirement of smallness. The two theorems mentioned rest on the crucial assumption that individuals living in society, and participating in market transactions, are all small, with respect to the markets where they transact. This assumption rules out elements of monopolistic power. Thus, if there are large players in the market who, on their own, are capable of affecting the market outcome, more specifically, the market price, the theorems are no longer valid. Indeed, in the jargon of theoretical economics, competition is synonymous with smallness and it is only in a strictly

competitive set up that the pursuit of self interest yields the desired outcome.

Therefore, the twin requirements of smallness and the lack of inequality are related. If we start with a society which is immensely unequal, it is only natural that those having a disproportionately large share of that society's wealth will also have substantial power over the market. Since in the real world we do observe substantial inequality, the requirements of the Welfare Theorems are unlikely to be met in practice.

What would be the economic consequences of selfish behaviour when the people involved are basically unequal with respect to their economic power? Inequality, by itself, is ethically unacceptable. But quite apart from ethical considerations, inequality may lead to straight forward economic inefficiencies. Firstly, in an unequal and selfish society where access to services is limited by market forces, the poor does not get basic facilities like health and education. This, in turn, reduces the quality of human capital of the society and seriously restricts the prospect of growth. Secondly, in the long run it is well-known that the rich spend a much smaller fraction of their income than the poor. Hence, if most of the income society is concentrated in the hands of the rich, there would be a general lack of consumption demand for goods and services which may lead to recession. Indeed, recessions due to lack of consumption have occurred again and again in free market economies. The most notable example of such recession is the great depression of the nineteen thirties. More recently, however, the world witnessed how human greed can directly lead to a deep economic crisis.

## Human Greed and the Sub-Prime Crisis

The financial crisis and the consequent economic recession, which had overshadowed the developed world a few years ago,

have not yet completely loosened its grip. Though in some sectors and countries early signs of recovery are being detected, other sectors and countries are falling prey to new crises and a complete restoration to normal economic activity is still out of sight. The ongoing recession is not confined to the advanced West and the newly developed Far East alone. Emerging economies, including the Indian economy, have been hit by the worldwide recession as well, usually in degrees proportionate to their extent of openness. The stinging recession has once again cast a basic doubt about the soundness and dependability of the free market economy run by selfish individuals in pursuit of their self-interest.

The crisis originated in the West, mainly in the United States, because of a fundamental change in the structure of banking. To understand the nature of the change and the ensuing crisis, we must know what institutional arrangement was there earlier and what did it change to. Before the financial sector transformation, banking in the West was by and large traditional. In the old financial system, conventional commercial banks performed a twin role. First, they acted as customary intermediaries between savers and investors and secondly, they performed the function of pooling risk. In their first role, the banks not only collected funds from the savers and made these funds available for investment, but in the process, managed to synchronize the depositors' frequent demand for withdrawal of funds at a short notice with their own investment of funds in long term projects where the returns were higher. The synchronization was made possible by the steady flow of new depositors and inter-bank flow of funds. The second function, namely that of risk-pooling, involved lending to some borrowers with higher default risk but higher return, and others with lower risk and lower return. By holding diversified and large portfolios of loans of varying

degrees of risk and return, and also by charging risk-adjusted borrowing rates, the banks could ensure a safe return to their depositors and keep a positive residual income for themselves.

The old system was not completely insulated from a crisis. If banks got greedy and exposed themselves to too much risk, or more importantly, if depositors believed that they did, a panic leading to a bank run was certainly on the cards. Indeed, examples of depositors' frenzy are not hard to find in the financial history of the West; they happened during the great depression in the United States and more recently during the Northern Rock crisis in the United Kingdom. But the point to note is that if a bank is not myopic, that is if it is not concerned with short run profits alone, then in its own interest it will avoid getting exposed to excessive risks. In other words, in the traditional banking framework, banks, in their own long run interest, went for a reasonable mix of risky and safe investments in their portfolios, pooled the risks and managed to earn enough profits after providing a safe return to the depositors. This happened because in the old system, in case of a default, it was the bank which had to shoulder the burden of the default and this prevented them from being excessively greedy.

It was the new financial architecture that became the root cause of all trouble. In the new design of things, a multilayered banking practice gradually replaced the old single-layered banking. The buzzword in the new system was securitization. It referred to a process where banks sold their pool of loans to another party and the latter sold a modified package of the same loans to investors. This procedure replaced the single layer system to multiple layers of transactions. To understand the intricacies of the new system, it is best to consider an example.

Since the crisis originated in the housing mortgage market, let us choose an example from that market. Suppose a number of

people have taken housing loans from a bank by mortgaging their houses they had bought with the loans. The money advanced by the bank would normally come back to it over a period of 15 to 20 years. Moreover, if some of these people failed to back their loans, the bank would have to suffer the losses. In the new system, however, the loans advanced would be put together by the bank and *sold* to a third party at a discount. After the loan is sold, the periodic repayment would go to the buyer who would also suffer losses if there is a default.

Who would buy the loans? What would he do with them? Usually the loans were bought by Investment Banks, Trusts or Non-depository Financial Institutions (NDFI). These institutions would then create securities known as Mortgage Based Securities (MBS) backed by the mortgages on the houses originally collected by the banks. Typically, a security would be backed by a complicated mixture of mortgages, more risky and less risky, and as a result the parties who bought the security had no clear idea about its exact risk element.

Initially, the new system pleased everyone. The banks were happy because of two reasons. First, in the new system they did not have to bear any risk associated with a loan. Secondly, compared to the old system, they had more liquidity. Indeed, instead of the usual twenty-year lock in period, the banks could get back the money they had advanced almost immediately after the loans were sold. There was, however, disadvantage. The loans had to be sold at a heavy discount and therefore the net return on them was very low. So to make up for the low profit per unit of loan, banks advanced more loans. Of course, to give out more loans, banks had to give loans to such risky borrowers whom they would consider ineligible for getting a loan in the old system. But this did not hurt the banks. Giving out riskier loans meant more expected default which in the old system would

certainly have hurt the banks. But in the new system, as the risk was shifted on to the third parties who bought the debt, the banks did not care. They went ahead advancing more and more bad loans. For the housing mortgage market this meant that even borrowers with uncertain incomes or bad credit histories could get bank loans to finance their purchase of houses.

Why were the buyers willing to buy the unsafe loans? At the risk of some simplification, we shall over identify, apart from the original borrowers (say, the house owners), three groups of players in the new financial system. We have already introduced the first group, namely the banks, which are also called arranger in the new financial system. The second type of agent, who is buying the loans from the arranger, is called the issuer. The second group consisted of investment banks like Lehman Brothers, Trusts like Fannie May or Freddie Mac and other NDFIs. After buying the loan from the arranger an issuer would typically do three things. First, it would appoint a servicer like J P Morgan or Amriquest who had the responsibility of collecting the periodic installments from the original borrower and give it to the issuer in exchange of a fee. Second, the issuer would create securities known as Mortgage Based Securities (MBS) which were backed by the mortgages originally collected by the arranger. Typically, these securities consisted of a mixture of mortgages with different chances of default. The MBS would be sold to investors who comprise the third important group of players in the new financial system.

Two important processes outlined the sale of MBS. First, the pools of securities were insured by reputed insurance companies. This gave a support to the system as long as default risks were not systemic, that is default probabilities were uncorrelated. However, the insurance supports would be totally ineffective if defaults were caused by some systemic failure, affecting

everyone, as was revealed later. Second the MBS were rated by reputed credit rating agencies. In those initial years of boom, the ratings were usually high. The MBS were sold to institutions like pension funds, mutual funds and banks , as well as to individuals. The investors were spread all over the world.

For a while, everyone was happy with the new arrangement. The arrangers were happy because they had more liquidity and had to shoulder less risk. The issuers were happy because they had found a new financial instrument to make money. The investors were happy to get an instrument where expected returns were high. Related players like insurance companies and credit rating agencies were happy because they were getting more business and getting higher profits. Indeed the feel-good factor was not confined to these large players alone. Optimism about the financial market in general led to a buoyant stock market where individuals participated directly or indirectly through mutual funds and made money, sometimes actual, but mostly notional. This induced a wealth effect which increased consumption demand and led to a general expansion of output and employment throughout the world.

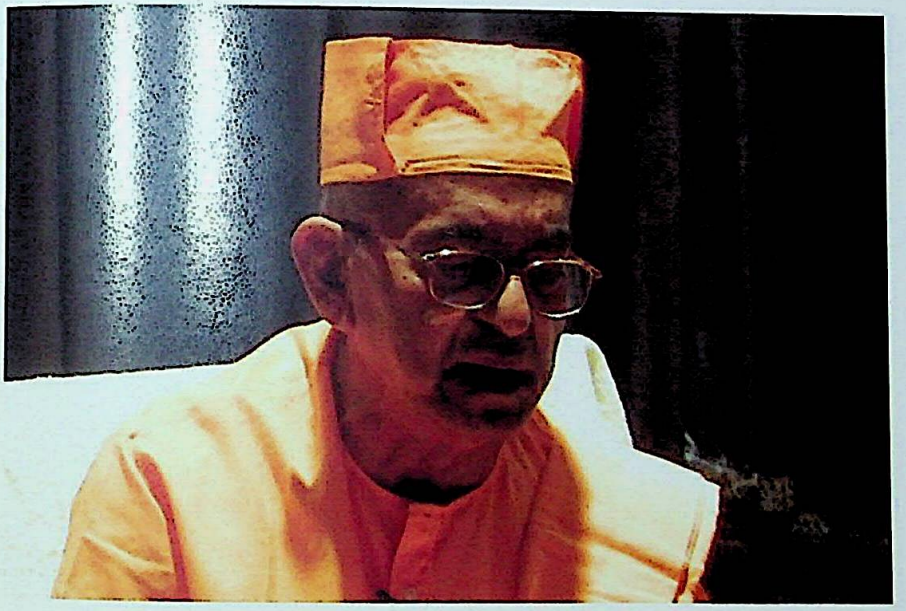
The entire burst of growth was obviously based on a very thin and weak foundation. To get the tempo going, the arrangers had to advance loans to those borrowers who did not really have the capacity to pay back the loans. In fact, to attract potential borrowers, loans were advanced at lower rates of interest than the prime lending rates (hence the term 'subprime crisis'), at least at the initial stages of repayment, and the whole banking practice was dragged into a plethora of increasing risk. It is more than likely that the big players, who were associated with the new banking practice, were aware of this increasing risk syndrome; yet as long as the housing market was in a boom, no one seemed to bother. Probably, they argued that as long as the value of the

mortgaged house was increasing, one could sell it off and get back the invested money, in case of default.

The crisis started when housing prices started to show symptoms of slowdown. There were several reasons for this. First, as the demand for houses went up due to the new housing loan policy of the banks, and the prices started rising, supply of houses gradually started catching up with demand. The increased supply put a downward pressure on prices. Second, the Fed increased the prime rate which reduced the demand for new houses. Third, some of the bad borrowers had started to default on their payments. So the issuers appropriated their houses and sold them in the market for the money. This increased the number of houses for sale in the market which brought down housing prices further. Finally, there were strategic defaults. As prices of houses started falling, some house owners saw that it was cheaper to default on mortgage payments than pay them. In the former situation the bank was to foreclose the house, the price of which had fallen below the present discounted sum of future mortgage payments. These strategic defaults put further downward pressure on housing prices leading to more defaults.

No insurance company, however large, could withstand this systemic default. As a result, giant insurance companies like AIG came to the verge of bankruptcy. The NDFIs, which had issued the MBS, tried for a while to maintain the value of these assets by maintaining their returns. To do this, they had to sell some of their assets and the only assets they could sell were the mortgages. Attempted sale of these mortgages to make up for the shortfall of payments due to investors, sent a signal to the investors that the MBS are much below their stated values. Getting panicky, the investors started selling their securities leading to a fall in their prices. The demand for these securities, however, evaporated and the NDFIs started being in the red. Mammoth investment

Participants of the Seminar



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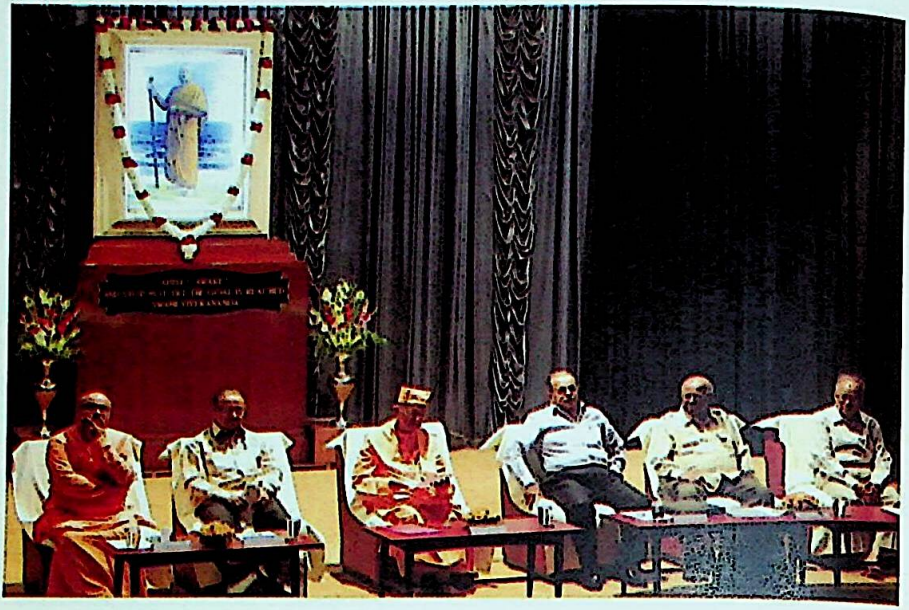

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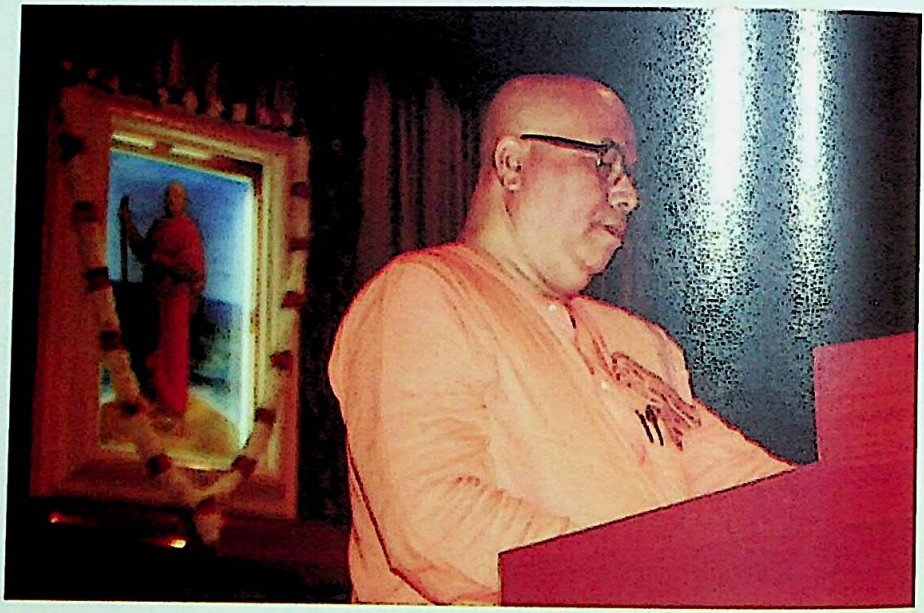

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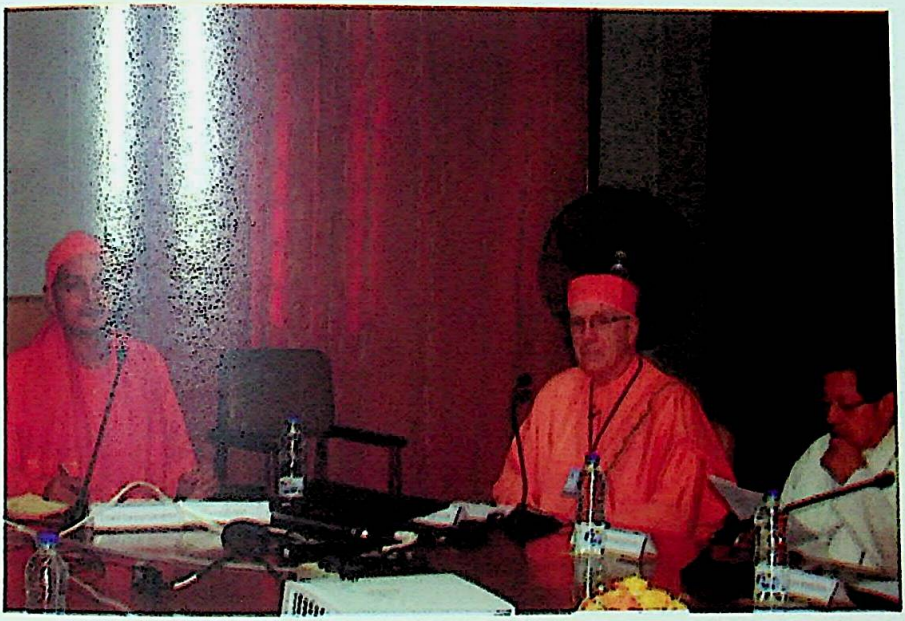

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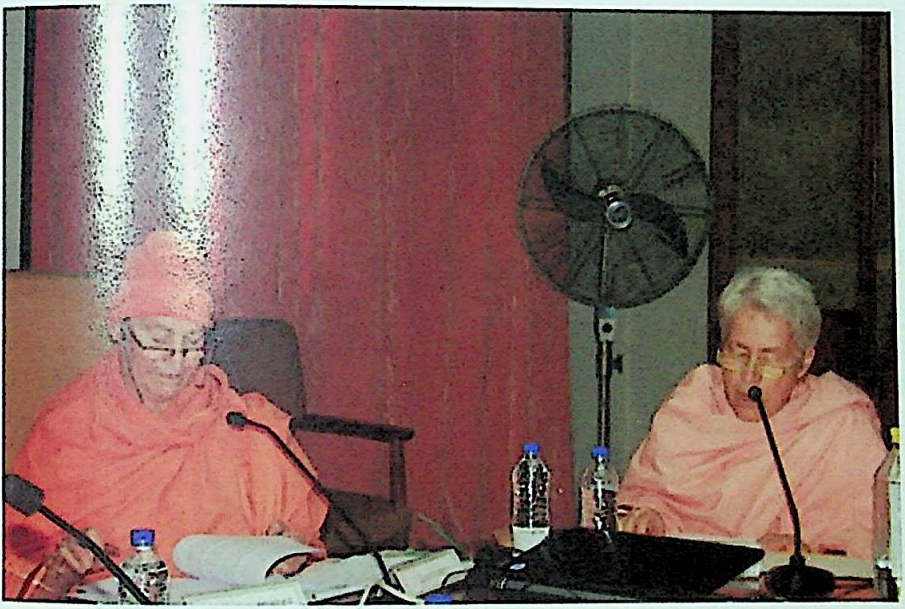

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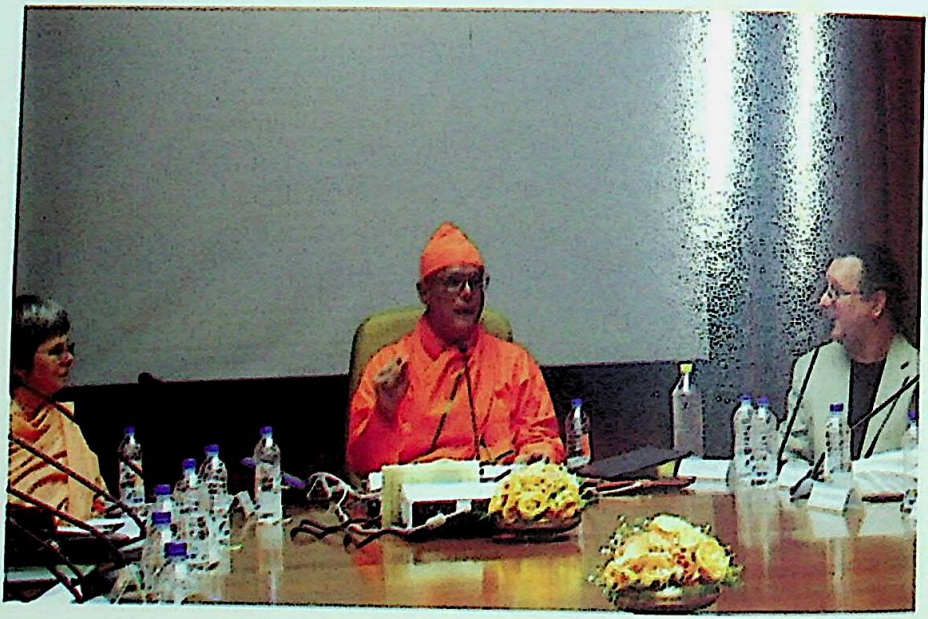

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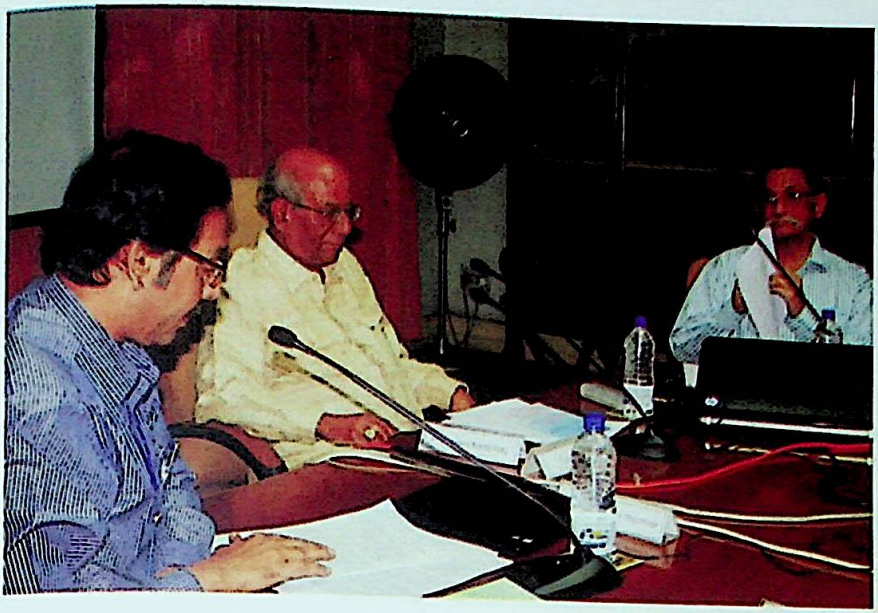

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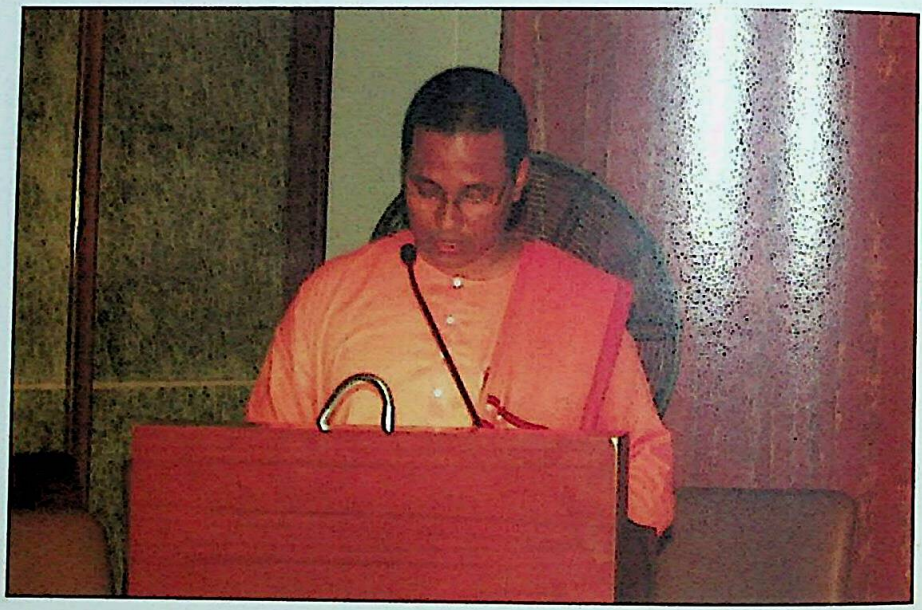

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banks like the Lehman Brothers declared themselves insolvent. As far as the financial sector was concerned, there were two seriously adverse effects. First, as all financial institutions, including banks, had some toxic assets in their portfolios, no one was sure about the actual quality of the balance sheet of a financial company. This uncertainty seriously jeopardized lending in general and inter-bank lending in particular. Secondly, as a direct consequence of the crisis, financial institutions became seriously under-capitalized, their liabilities far exceeding their assets, the values of which had deteriorated as a result of the subprime crisis.

The financial crisis was soon transformed into a full-scale economic recession. The process started from the supply side. The critical financial environment prompted the banks to significantly reduce their lending. This had an immediate contractionary effect on economic transactions. New projects had to be cancelled and unfinished projects had to be postponed. The contraction had its toll on output and employment. The supply-induced fall in output and employment had a secondary effect through demand. As output and employment began to spiral down, firms found demand for their products to be low, which induced them to reduce their demand for investment and credit. A full-fledged recession set in throughout the capitalist world.

Who were the gainers and who were the losers from the crisis? The losers were easy to identify. Thousands of people who lost their jobs all over the world were big losers. Again, unsuspecting income-earners, whose retirement funds were invested in toxic securities by their fund-managers, were big losers. Some of them found their life time savings dwindling into half of their value overnight. Small businessmen, whose livelihood depended on the general sentiment of the market, were also

losers. The gainers were the handful of Mughals of the financial market, the CEOs of big financial companies. There are very good reasons to believe that these small number of people had complete knowledge of what was going on, right from the beginning, for it was they who fabricated the mammoth fraud. They made tons of money when the economy was buoyant and went unpunished when it busted. The lesson is that because of the greed and selfishness of a small number of people, the world economy went through a crisis, hurting millions.

### The Soviet Experiment

The rise and fall of the Soviet Union gives the other extreme picture of human greed. The socialist nation was built on the basic premise that free markets are exploitative. What is the theoretical justification behind this premise? The Marxian Labour Theory of Value may be taken as a starting point. According to the Labour Theory of Value, the value of a commodity consists only of the value of labour it involves the embodied materials being provided by nature. Therefore ,in an ideal social set up, where natural resources are not owned by individuals, the value of a commodity must be distributed to labour. Part of the value may be directly distributed to labour as wage. The remaining may be collected by the state as social surplus which ought to be distributed again to the workers by some social distribution mechanism. Clearly, if this way of thinking is correct, free market transactions in capitalist economies are exploitative from the point of view of labour because they involve payments like profits and rents, which basically emerge from private ownership of factors of production.

Consequently, production was planned on the basis of social needs and distributed through official networks. A big emphasis was put on industrialization based on capital intensive heavy

industries and agriculture was largely neglected. Resources were mobilized on a war footing and for a few decades the Soviet Union experienced spectacular growth. During the nineteen thirties when the entire western world was reeling under the influence of the Great Depression, the Soviet economy not only seemed insulated from international disturbances but actually registered a positive rate of growth. To the western world, news of this growth continued till the 1960s. Indeed, the launch of the sputnik and the early Soviet lead in space technology along with the rapidly growing Soviet Union and its satellite nations both impressed and frightened the western opinion leaders till the 1960s. The coliseum, built on socialist ideology, had, however, feet of clay.

While the growth of Soviet income led to innumerable alarmist books and polemical articles in the west, the few research endeavours that were undertaken to understand the forces behind such a growth process, came out with a rather different story. Careful research repeatedly revealed that Soviet growth was due to the growth of several inputs: labour, physical and human capital in the form of a more educated labour force. What was surprisingly missing was growth of efficiency or productivity. In this respect, there was a fundamental difference between the growth processes of the western countries and that of the Soviet bloc. In the West, growth was due to both the growth of factors of production as well as growth of efficiency, but in the Soviet Union it was solely the growth of the former. This had a serious economic implication. While there are obvious limits to the physical growth of the factors of production, productivity growth, which depends among other things on technical innovation, has practically no upper limit. As a result, Soviet growth started slowing down from the 1970s, as was inevitable. Growth of output per worker, which was 5.8% during

the 1950s, came down to 2.1% in the 1970s. Again, productivity growth became negative in the 1960s and remained so till the end of the communist regime.

During the sub-prime crisis in the United States, in the Soviet Union a few elites did really well, while the masses suffered. Though the economy was characterized by general shortages, the elites lived in luxury. There was a vicious cycle. Since productivities were low, wages were also low by Western European standards. But because wages were low, the workers did not have an incentive to work. As a consequence, productivities were low. Competition in general and incentives given to the workers through a rigorous reward-punishment system were very much required to restore productivity. But this was not in the interest of the political elite who preferred to capture the resources through their political power rather than through general competition. The result was wide-spread inefficiency and economic stagnation. The official machinery was extensively used to suppress the economic reality, but that did not change the actual reality. In short, greed and selfishness of a few elites led to the final breakdown of the socialist experiment. The dream of an equal society could not be realized because a few selfish individuals at the top.

## Concluding Remarks

This short essay tries to make a simple, yet, in our opinion, an important point. By giving example of the United States during the recent sub-prime crisis on the one hand and that of the suffering of the masses in the Soviet Union during the long communist regime on the other, the essay argues that neither the competition based capitalist system, nor the state controlled socialist mode of production and distribution have performed particularly well in recent years. We identify the primary reason

for this failure as human selfishness. The position taken in this essay significantly differs from conventional wisdom. While mainstream economic thinking views selfish behavior as a means of achieving economic well-being, traditional Marxism assumes that selfishness will disappear from the human nature once the rule of the proletariat is established. History has confirmed neither of these stances. We, therefore, believe that ethical and moral teachings are extremely important in developing the character of humans and in building the fabric of society. In this respect, we feel that the teachings of Vivekananda are invaluable and extremely relevant to the modern world.

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# Brief Summing Up

Hemadri Chatterjee

I am indeed honoured and privileged to present the Brief Summing Up of the proceedings of the International Seminar on **International Understanding for Human Unity: Past Lessons and Present Prospects**, organised by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park with financial assistance from the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

During the three day of deliberations, a galaxy of eminent thinkers, academicians, scholars, social leaders, creative personalities shared their views and varied thoughts on a wide variety of topics. After the Vedic chanting, in his Welcome Address Swami Sarvabhutanandaji Maharaj extended his heartiest welcome to all present and said that the essential unity of mankind is the core teaching of Swami Vivekananda. Vedanta preaches the oneness of existence. Manifoldness seen is ignorance of this oneness. Our hearts beat with the same truth. He hoped that this three-day seminar, organised as part of the celebrations to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda would bring about a better understanding with the people of different faiths and religions.

Prof. Radharaman Chakrabarti gave a brief outline of the seminar. The seminar is essentially about humanity, the core concern being the collective destiny of human beings wherever they are. The journey of human civilisation has rarely ever been smooth or uniform. Despite this overall direction of the movement appears to have been on the positive track. Stress has been laid ultimately on stability over instability, collaboration over discord amalgamation over exclusion and so on. The seminar is

an inclusive enquiry into these aspects. It has two important purposes. The first one is: to put the basic lesson of history to a litmus test, through searching queries that address the present day realities. The second one is related to the modality of the seminar. We would be exercising our minds essentially in the inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary modes. The valued and varied thoughts, the distilled wisdom of a unique combination of scholars from a wide range of disciplines drawn from across the world would make a multi-dimensional dialogue materialise. The seminar would be examining the validity of received wisdom on all related questions and would put to test the present ability of societies to move further ahead towards the goal of human unity.

In the Inaugural Address delivered by Prof. Aswini Kanta Ray, he talked about the co-relationship between Democracy and Human Unity. He then pleaded for a dialogue of civilisation where both East and West can learn from each other. Western Philosophy has two important aspects – the idea of Industrial Capitalism and the idea of Liberal Democracy. He candidly stated that the argument in the paper is to suggest that liberal democracy in its quintessential term and human unity is still a very far cry. Liberal Democracy has not been replicated. Democracy has largely survived because liberal democratic norms have been modified structured to local specifications. He cited the Gross National Happiness of Bhutan which is sought to be replicated in France. Liberal democracy is strongly presented through individualism. What we need is a lowest common denominator as to what constitutes democracy through cross-cultural dialogue.

In the Keynote Address, Revered Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj spoke on the **Quest for Human Unity as viewed by Swami Vivekananda.** Religion is unavoidable – it is what binds us. The essence of religion is spirituality— it is being and

becoming. Maharaj quoted from Will Durant, Arnold Toynbee and Albert Einstein to say that religion cannot be abolished. The uniqueness of Indian Civilisation is characterised by the creation of a composite culture and by maintaining a remarkable degree of flexibility. Spirit of one subsists between the units. Organic unity brings about positive changes. Knowledge is finding unity in the midst of diversity. Swami Vivekananda preached a universalist, Vedantic religion. The idea of separateness is erroneous, in the heart of things there is an inherent unity and deep enough all will be seen as variations of the same. Unity is a fact of life.

The topic of the Presidential Address delivered by Justice Asok Kumar Ganguly was **Indian Idea of Human Unity**. Justice Ganguly began by citing Guru Nanak and Kabir to convey the message of the Unity of Human Beings. There are five concepts of Human Unity – (i) Satya, (ii) Dharma, (iii) Shanti, (iv) Prema & (v) Ahimsa. An English translation of these Sanskrit terms would not be able to encapsulate the concepts. He then went on to explain the wide contours that each of these five Sanskrit words encompassed. These values, he opined can only exist in an equal world. Human Unity can be brought about by eradicating the social evils that exist in our life. He called upon all the practice with three things:

Avoid a dishonest man
Raise your voice to the extent possible
Spread this idea

He exhorted everyone to follow Swamiji's ideals as this would bring about real unity.

In the first Academic session Swami Atmarupananda spoke on **East and West in Swami Vivekananda's Vision: a Dynamic Harmony**. The encounter between the East and the West existed for the last five centuries. There is a wide spectrum of thought regarding the prospects of this encounter. One side

was famously expressed by Rudyard Kipling, who said, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." A diametrically opposing view is that the whole idea of the abstraction of the East and the West was a fallacy: people are not different. Both these views are not tenable. Swami Vivekananda stood in between the differences of the East and the West. He respected the differences, but saw it rooted in the universal. Each culture should assimilate the best of the others while maintaining its own character. He saw a common humanity among all cultures. It was in this background that he saw diversities as manifestations of the same unity. Non-dual reality manifests itself only in the adverse. Integrity of the particular must be respected. Although he advocated the idea of assimilation, he abhorred imitation. Diversity is a biological necessity. Swamiji saw the East and the West as two ongoing experiments with diversities in them.

Prof. Gwilym Beckerlegge's in his paper titled **Harmony of East and West in Swamiji's Vision**, attempted to review some of the expectations since Vivekananda's first visit to the United States and Europe in the 1890s down to the present day. The paper also considered how we might translate these earlier expectations into contemporary concerns, reflecting on whether expectations have changed over the intervening century and how the message of Vedanta is being presented to the West. Prof. Beckerlegge began by drawing upon the sympathetic commentators like Max Mueller and Romain Rolland and moved to the present-day secularism and religious literacy in Britain. For many people spirituality has replaced religion as old allegiances and social identities are transformed by modernity.

**Swami Vivekananda's Unopened Birthday Present: the Gift of Listening** was the title of the next paper. Swami Vivekananda is well-renowned for his gift of eloquence but the

art of listening is another gift which he left for us. The gift, which Prof. Hal W. French terms as "inloquence", is not eloquent speech, but the compensatory quality of listening. Prof. French explored how Vivekananda models that gift, in his relationship, first, to Ramakrishna, to the internalized voice of the goddess, to the myriad voices of Mother India, and to those whom he encountered in his travels to the West. Vivekananda, as a listener, had the capacity to hear each of his close friends, to respect who they were, and each cherished his gifts to them. Following his example, the human community may experience a larger measure of unity through cultivating our potential to listen to the words and lives of persons in different faith communities and to hear and respond to the discordant voices which threaten that unity. The ability and willingness to listen to others is one prerequisite for bringing about an International Understanding for Human Unity: Past Lessons and Present Prospects.

As the preparatory remarks during the presentation of his paper on **Human Unity and India's Message to the World,**. Prof. P. K. Mukhopadhyay, chose to change the general theme of the seminar from International Understanding for Human Unity: Past Lessons and Present Prospects to International Understanding for Human Unity: Past Lessons, **Present State and Future Prospects.** The concept of Human Unity or belief in it is nothing new. Past lesson was a grand failure as Unity was searched but not achieved. To build the future we have to conceptualise it properly. Prof. Mukhopadhyay drew our attention to the Eastern Human Unity Discourse, an exclusively Indian Unity Discourse and the Western Unity Discourses or Non-exclusive Western Unity Discourses. The Western Human Discourses was a result of three discourses – 1. Christian Utopia, 2. Marxist-Socialist Utopia, and 3. Social Democracy Utopia Unity Discourses. The uniquely Indian Unity Discourse has a

Vedantic Vision. The entire world is Unitary – everything is identifiable with one Unified Consciousness Discourse called the Spiritual Vedantic Discourse. This evolved under the two conditions: (i) Renaissance Religious Reform Movements in the 19th century and (ii) Orientalist Construct of India. India did not merely have a spiritual culture, it had a total culture. Social Democracy Unity Discourse is where both the Unity Discourses converge.

The subject for Prof. Sourin Bhattacharya's paper was **Bringing Nations Closer: an Environmentalist Approach.** Prof. Bhattacharya wondered why nations should or may want to come together and sought to find answers to this. He talked about the idea of planetarity and suggested that we follow James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis and Nicholas Gregoscu's – Rogen's Idea. Whereas the Gaia hypotheses postulates that the Earth maintains and regulates its biosphere in a state of 'preferred homeostasis', Nicholas Gregoscu's – Rogen's Idea centres round the concept of change, as different from locomotion.

In his paper on **Globalisation and the Clash of Civilisations**, Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, asked if globalisation would reduce the discord and listed the reasons which bring about a diminution of conflict in a globalisation process. He argued that these may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for bringing about a Cultural Unity. He talked about the impact of the reinforcements of identities and modern technology. He referred to Prof. Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations*, perhaps the most scholarly work on international understanding, or the lack of it. In the light of the Huntington Scheme, he talked about the difference between civilisations, competing state systems, conflict between states and enhancement of inter-cultural differences. He quoted from Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Radhakumud

Mookerji, Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru to present the Indian Nationalists' answer to the conflict of identities.

Prof. Bikas C. Sanyal spoke on **The Evolution of the Process of International Understanding for Human Unity** and while doing so described the evolution of international understanding of human unity and peace. His roadmap began with the concept of humanity and the role of religion in pre-Christian era, moved through the role of philosophy in early modern period. And then he talked about Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant and went on to concepts of human unity followed by organizational and institutional arrangements to achieve human unity. He cited the Concert of Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, The World Parliament of Religions and its objectives, the setting up of the League of Nations, its failure and setting up of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and its objectives. The paper then went on to discuss the relevance and message of Swami Vivekananda on universalism based on "Practical Vedanta" in promoting international understanding. The paper ended by giving some educational strategies to implement Swami Vivekananda's ideas.

**International Institutions in Service of Humanity** was the subject of Prof. Radharaman Chakrabarti's deliberations. As a prelude to his presentation, the speaker fell back on Sankara and Swami Vivekananda to demonstrate what concentration of energy and single-minded pursuit is involved when institutions with lofty purposes are required to be created. Two fundamental principles were taken note of for the formation of institution building – one is the central motivating objective, propagating and perpetuating certain preferred values and the other is the possibility of there being many such preferred values which deserve priority. But we need to know and emphasize is the proportion of institutions which worked in unison and those who

worked at cross purposes. An attempt was made in the paper to get into the basic principles behind the process of institutionalisation. He talked at length about various institutions like the United Nations and its semi-organised systems like the UNEP and their various activities over the years. He also took due care in his paper to point out where mankind may get over-powered by anti-people forces both within and outside national boundaries.

In her paper titled, **Global Ecology as a Mass-Driven Initiative,** Pravrajika Vrajaprana Mataji contends that Global Ecology as a Mass-Driven Initiative towards unity that has profound spiritual and social ramifications. While this movement has grown stronger over the years, it has been outpaced by the pace of environment destruction. Environmental degradation now poses a serious threat to life on the planet. Humanity's earlier relationship with the environment cutting across national, cultural, racial, religious boundaries was one of reverence for the earth. In Hinduism the earth and all her creatures have a loving, reciprocal relationship that is based on unity and an eternal and all-encompassing law of harmony and balance. Selfishness a result of spiritual crisis is the root cause of our current environmental crisis. The only way to remove and overcome this crisis is to take to heart Swamiji's message of unity.

In **Carving out a Space: Women and Social Movement Politics in India**, the title of her paper, Prof. Rajasri Basu, gave a few statistical data to show the gross inequality that exists in our country. The structures of democracy have spread throughout the world. The process of democratisation has three major turns:

i) The initial journey

ii) The spread of democracy in other countries where people had their voice in initiatives that led to a new kind of systems

iii) The third turn is qualitatively different from the other two in as much as these mass initiatives are apolitical

She cited three instances to explain these apolitical mass movements. The first of which was a result of a cross-religious marriage between two adults. The second incident occurred in Guwahati where a girl was chased, beaten and molested in full public view. This was filmed and broadcast on a TV channel. The third incident occurred in Delhi. But there was a ray of hope as there was a national outrage throughout the country. There were countrywide spontaneous protests and these mass driven movements to force the powers that be, to make significant changes to bring about justice are examples of how the spirit of people brings about the process of democratisation.

Prof. Jeffery Long's topic for discussion was **Swami Vivekananda and the Role of Intercultural Dialogue in Saving our Human Heritage.** His paper explored the details of Swamiji's vision of inter-cultural and inter-religious harmony particularly in regard to inter-religious dialogues with a special concern to dispel widespread misconceptions about Swami Vivekananda's message. Swamiji carved out a middle path between the extremes of absolutism and relativism into which world views typically fall. There is an internal logical consistency of the Harmony of Religions. Inter-religious dialogue is an important part of the process of spiritual evolution for each person in every religious tradition and everyone will benefit spiritually by engaging in it. Swamiji's ideal of a "universal religion" is rather a commonwealth of religions.

In her paper on **Unity-in-Difference: Intercultural Dialogue,** Pravrajika Gitaprana Mataji aimed to focus on the process of intercultural dialogue. She began with the story of a Swambhu Shiva Linga in Golden Gate Park to introduce a few key points in the process of intercultural dialogue. The first of

these is the fact that intercultural dialogue takes place when people come together to achieve a common goal. The second is that there are some values and principles shared universally by people around the globe. The third is the fact that intercultural dialogues necessarily require the use of language. The fourth is an assumption that participants of such dialogues would possess and develop the ability to listen in an unbiased open-minded way. Another point that is for effective intercultural dialogue to take place participants should know about their own culture and cultural history. There are six stages of the development of intercultural dialogues. They are denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation and finally integration and in that order. She concluded with Swamiji's observation where he pointed out that unity may be a metaphysical reality, variation is the law of nature and it will always be so.

His presentation on **States and the Use of Force: Trends and Restraints**, Prof. Anindyajyoti Mazumder enunciated his views that a state uses force in its relation with others and justifies such use on the ground of supreme interests of the nation. It is doubtful if all states behave in a militarist way. A state arms itself in response to the arming of another state. Prof. Mazumder explored into the Indian strategic thinking as an alternative paradigm. The Indian doctrines convey the message of non-provocative defence, non-predatory in character and often termed as 'strategic restraint' or even 'strategic timidity'. Indian culture of non-domination is a result of India's cultural heritage and historical experience. He talked about the restraining measures, peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict avoidance, arms control, disarmament and confidence building steps to curb the militarist tendencies of the states.

While talking about **India's Frontiers**, General (Retd.) Sankar Roy Chowdhury said that the war is a conflict that can be

taken at any point of time. India is economically and culturally powerful and reasonably powerful militarily. The main threat to India today is fundamentalism. We happen to be the epicentre of fundamentalism from this part of the world. We are a genuinely democratic and secular country. We are under the threat of violent fundamentalism. To counter this there has to be a sufficiently robust counter idea. The time has come for the institutions like the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture to take an initiative in this regard. Swami Vivekananda was a very positive and muscular minded person. Swamiji's teachings have to be re-organised, re-studied in the present contemporary context to formulate our strategies and geo-politics. India's frontiers have become internal too. Our main frontiers would be the Indian Ocean, the elephant in the room, as he preferred to refer to it. We are really apprehensive about nothing. Our main threat is fundamentalism for which we need to device a doctrine. Swami Vivekananda is a very good doctrinal source to deal with this problem.

Prof. Debal Ray talked about **Protecting Ecological Integrity of a Fragile Planet**. He presented a case study of an ecological disaster – the story of Easter Island (a south Pacific Island). This island once used to support a Polynesian population. The collapse of Easter was brought about by deforestation and destruction of environment is to be blamed as proximate cause of this collapse. And there was certain key environmental processes that was under stressed, chief of which were—

- Bio-diversity loss
- Phosphorus force of Ocean
- Nitrogen removal
- Stratospheric Ozone depletion
- Climate change
- Ocean Acidification

And then he very relevant questions: Are we going through mass extinction? He talked about the geological triggers of mass extinctions, the current cause of extinction, distinguishing features of mass extinction, criteria of achieving physical sustainability, ecological footprint and bio-capacity by region. He also gave some very relevant and pertinent examples of environmental degradation with photographs. Finally, he ended by touching upon the Rivet Theory to shake us away from our complacency.

In his paper on **Protecting our little Planet**, Sri Hirak Ghose dealt with popular misconception that our actions will not harm the planet. Revolution in the fields of agriculture, industry and health has resulted in the improvement in the standard of living and longevity. On the other hand, industrialisation, urbanisation, intensive agriculture, continuous increase in population and poverty have had very adverse consequences. He brought to our notice the future effects of climate change and talked about the means for sustainable development and emphasised the need for a firm resolve to halt the deterioration of the environment.

**Swami Vivekananda as a Socio-Economic Thinker**— the subject of the presentation of Swami Tyagarupananda, the speaker wondered if the basic economic theories based on the empirical evidence of our country would be able to solve the socio-economic development of our country too. Swami Vivekananda's vision of the country was a result of his knowledge and his wide-ranging experience. For social reformers of the period, Swamiji had stressed the three important qualities:

Heart to feel
A concrete plan
A tremendous perseverance

Maharaj quoted it from *Prachyo O Paschatyo* to tell Swamiji's views on the state, consumers, producers, middlemen and the like. He also referred to Swamiji's book *Bartaman Bharat* (Modern India) to highlight Swamiji's social and political acumen. According to Swami Vivekananda utilitarianism was not suited to the Indian context.

Dr. Abhirup Sarkar while speaking on **Economic Crises and Human Values** felt that selfishness is one of the chief postulates of the Neo-Classical Economics. Economic theory rests on two basic postulates:

a) Individual choice is the basis of all economic decisions
b) Individuals are selfish

Is it right to model economic agents as primarily selfish? He talked about the consequences of selfishness and he referred to two rather surprising inclusions— one is about the completion of selfishness be either leads to paradoxical efficiency. Any efficient process can be implemented through competition of selfishness. Competition and selfish behaviour leads to Parreto Efficiency. He argued that in general inequality would jeopardise the theorems and functioning of free capitalist economy. After explaining the anatomy of the crisis Prof. Sarkar opined that selfishness did not lead to an optimal situation. The Soviet experiment failed due to human greed. For bringing about sustainable economic development there is a serious need for spiritual transformation of humans to deal with this serious problem. He ended by talking about a few teachings of Swami Vivekananda and said that the time had come for us to pay serious attention to the teachings of great minds like Vivekananda, Rabindranath and Gandhi.

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# International Institutions: Devices in the Service of Humanity

Radharaman Chakrabarti

# International Institutions: Devices in the Service of Humanity

Radharaman Chakrabarti

Of the diverse forms in which mankind manifests its originality, institution building falls in a special category. Once in place, and time tested , institutions acquire a stature and create an impact that make them stand out as big signposts of civilization. To illustrate this general observation, I would like to bring in two instances which, at first sight, may not show any direct connection with my presentation. Nonetheless, they signify quite a lot. One belongs to a relatively distant past and the other is taken from the relatively recent past. The former relates to the creation of four major monasteries that Acharya Sankara set up in four corners of our country along with ten sects or paths of Hindu spiritual pursuits known as *dasanami sampradaya.* It is common knowledge that these innovations were intended to create a kind of rallying points and introduce a degree of order which was so badly needed by the chaos that had befallen Hinduism in those times. The Sankarite initiative survives even today as a permanent testimony to the consolidation of the *sanatana* spiritual energy which, otherwise, was getting dispersed and dissipated.

A little over a millennium later, another such marvel occurred, now on a gigantic global scale and with much, much wider, truly universal message to propagate .This was the work of Swamiji whose 150th birth anniversary is being observed today. Swamiji in deference to Sankara said, "that 32 year old Acharya was a wonder of wonders". We can as well say the same thing of Swamiji as we look at the sprawling institutions of the Ramakrishna Order. Let me explain the reason why I fell back upon Sankara and Swamiji as a prelude to my presentation. And that was mainly

to demonstrate what concentration of energy and single minded pursuit is involved when institutions with such lofty purpose are required to be created. And, particularly, in the case of Swamiji the guiding spirit is as lofty as *atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha.* For institutions to endure in whatever sphere-religious or secular, national or international, the supreme objective has to be service to humanity or else they will simply pale into insignificance. Another object-lesson in institution building, taking the cue from Sankara and Swamiji again, is that, institutions must maintain a superior order in terms of discipline and creative faculty. In such an order, human energy, human intellect and human imagination can be channelized for the greater good of humanity. Also Institutions can thus avoid chaos, anarchy and ad hocism.

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Coming now to the international arena which is the announced context of my presentation, we take note of two fundamental principles that inform institution building. One is that, there has to be a central motivating objective, i.e. to propagate and perpetuate certain preferred values and defend them against contrary positions already existing or is arising within the national or international sphere. Second, and this follows from the first, is the possibility of there being not one but many such preferred values which deserve priority. Accordingly, there would emerge a plurality of institutions to uphold and realize those differentiated values. Hence, what we notice in the international sphere today is the proliferation of a whole range of institutions—a few of them are found engaged in pursuing larger, near universalistic goals while numerous others stay focussed on specific tasks. And, historically speaking, it is the latter group of institutions which sprang up much earlier than the multiple tasking or holistically ordained larger bodies. Also, notably, it is the smaller, specialized institutions which have proved to be relatively more efficient and

more qualified to be basically service oriented and hence indispensable. I am referring to the numerous organisations engaged in functional collaboration—of which the UNESCO is an outstanding example. Like the UNESCO, there are nearly a couple of hundred specialized bodies, a large number of them now placed under the common umbrella of the United Nations. Without trying to present a list of their wide ranging activities, let me simply illustrate how our normal day to day existence is deeply interlaced with these bodies. For instance, an aerogram, a faxed message, an overseas parcel containing relief materials which we may receive or send—all have the supportive services of one international body or the other—the UPU (Universal Postal Union), or ITU (International Telecom Union) or the International Red Cross or an NGO like the OXFAM. There is, again, the WHO which sets the standard practices regarding health care, medication and eradication of killer diseases. So also, there is the UNICEF that takes care of child welfare all over the world.

Like us individuals, even our sovereign States cannot do without approaching international organizations—say, the WMO (World Meteorological Organization) for global weather information, the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) for launching interstate airlines services with remote guided flight safety and ground facilities, or the INTERPOL to track down fugitive criminals. Similarly, there are inter-governmental cartels like the OPEC where quantity and price of the oil to be marketed are decided regularly.

Having mentioned bodies like these making significant contributions to human convenience and human welfare, question would naturally arise: Are all efforts at institution building being beneficial to the humanity ? The scepticism implied in this question is not unjustified. We cannot, or rather, must not lose sight of organized practices that run contrary to these laudable objectives.

Since there are malevolent traits and negative orientations in some human beings as well as sectarian groups, bodies or agencies may crop up that have a destructive agenda – such as the terrorist outfit like the Al-Qaida or the clandestine network of narcotic smuggling in the so-called golden triangles of Asia and Latin America or unorganized groups engaged in cyber crimes of bewildering variety.

Why talk only about private groups? States are also known to have indulged in erecting warlike organizations- the NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Clearly, these were not intended to serve peace or humanity in any sense of the terms. Unrestrained aggressiveness as had been at work behind the infamous Manhattan project of the US created an impossible situation where restraining other nuclear aspirants became an all time headache. For which, again, the UN had to commission the IAEA to watch out for any proliferation activity. Examples like these, only serve to remind us that we human beings are not by definition a peaceable or philanthropic lot. Institutions are needed to leash the inherent wickedness in man. When instigated by anti-people, anti-peace elements in political power, such wickedness can end up in violence of frightening proportions. The two world wars demonstrated to what length can states go up to, and the many post-war occurrences of armed conflict, though somehow contained at some point or other, have led to immense collateral damages. Widespread displacement of settled families, refugee influx into nearby territories, ethnic cleansing, and general devastation of the economy are some of the invariable consequences that have got to be tackled. Above all, the shadow of a chance outbreak of nuclear showdown would haunt nations as long as these weapons are in the possession of some powers with little reputation of accommodative behaviour.

In order to combat these frightening prospects, the United Nations was established as a forum of global resistance, otherwise also known as a collective security system, against all forms of inter-state violence (vide Charter Article 2 para 4). This happened 68 years ago, following the signing ceremony at San Francisco, where for the first time smaller nations of the world were represented side by side with the big powers and registered their viewpoints regarding the emerging global order. Being an immediate successor to the League of Nations, commentators said, "At San Francisco, history was not so much being made as being remade".

Judging by later developments, this early assessment seems to have been rather cautious and conservative. The history of the UN to date has been far from being a mere repetition of all that happened in the pre-world war period for peace preservation. It has survived long seven decades of turmoil and tension unlike its short-lived predecessor. More important, the UN has proved to be a versatile instrument to reap the peace dividends of centrally regulated international relations the like of which could not be anticipated earlier. Today, nobody in her/his senses would think of dispensing with the UN— in spite of many frustrating experiences through which it had and still has to go. As yet, it is the only organization of its kind which is universal in composition and has shown proven capacity to ensure restoration of normalcy and necessary damage control measures after an occasional assault on the structure of peace. All this, the UN has been trying to do in the teeth of great power resistance, against the reckless folly of smaller nations fighting against each other and under the looming shadow of nuclear conflagration any time, anywhere. When one thinks of these and similar tendencies that are patently pernicious, one is forced to conclude that mankind is the only biological species on earth which can be its own worst enemy

and, perhaps, terminator, so, why not leash them? Why not intercept nuclear smuggling? Easier said than done—is the most likely reaction to the aforesaid proposition. True, but that does not mean that the 'doing part' would have to be discarded or indefinitely postponed. At least the UN, as it stands today, does not believe in a stand-off. On the contrary, it allows itself to be transformed and transformed radically as it grows from a mere security organization into an institution for service to humanity.

## III

The UN today is fast developing into a global service institution, looking after the welfare of peoples across national boundaries. While it certainly accords security concerns the due priority. For instance, the Security Council at the moment is seized with the dangers of nuclear proliferation (be it in Iran or in North Korea) —it has taken up myriad tasks that appears to be unprecedented, unheard of even ten/twenty years back. Thus, what was started in the mid-1950s as Peacekeeping Operation to set apart warring parties and enforce ceasefire, has now grown into a much broader programme of "peace building operation". This means the UN now accepts positive responsibility in creating the internal conditions necessary for normal, peaceful development of post-conflict societies—whether torn by civil war (such as in Sudan or Sri Lanka) or interstate armed aggression (such as in Serbia or Lebanon). Many countries in Africa with ill-assorted tribal formations are prone to frequent domestic strife. Regime change in some societies, such as Nepal, results in prolonged turmoil. Peace settlement in all such cases now involves not only disarming the warring groups but providing relief to the suffering civilians, reconstructing the dilapidated state structure, democratising the political process and kickstarting a stable domestic economy.

Fortunately, experience tells us that civilization and culture would not allow complete triumph of the evil forces in man. The

remedy, as has been very correctly identified in the UNESCO charter, lies in the very 'minds of men' where aggression originates. And this perversion and impurity of human mind can go only when corrective endeavours are automatically set in motion. Such endeavours need not be confined only to post facto counterforce measures. What they entail is also creating those conditions in which war-making would come to be viewed as outmoded and unnecessary. For, peace does not mean just the absence of war. Peace thrives only by combined efforts at a conscious cultural reconstruction of human mentality. Nations must make intelligent calculation of how much they may gain from conflict escalation and how much they stand to lose. It also requires the growth of an ideology of peace which should be inclusivist. Neither can it be a prisoner of such alarmist projections as we find in Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* scenario as unmitigated destiny of peoples at loggerheads for many a reason other than cultural variance. Civilizations come into clash only when there is no interface, no meaningful dialogue between cultures. The attitude of exclusion, the derisive attitude to ward the "other", the patronizing mood of the self-styled superior, sometimes a cultivated mentality of hatred on both sides have so long impeded inter-cultural dialogue. These roadblocks have to be removed if civilizations must survive clashes.

These call for situation-specific action programmes involving a good deal of spot innovations on the part of the UN civil and para-military services. These apart, The UN now addresses social and developmental concerns of a continuous nature—as was reflected in the adoption of its Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Setting 2015 as the target year for completion, the UN General Assembly adopted eight major strands of MDG which include:

i) Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
ii) Achieving universal primary education

iii) Promoting gender equality and empowering women;
iv) Reducing child mortality rate;
v) Improving maternal health;
vi) Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
vii) Ensuring environmental sustainability and
viii) Developing a global partnership for development.

If we look at these state objectives, we should be able to see that they actually amount to a set of clear undertakings voluntarily accepted by all member states; they are not just wishful resolutions passed by a section of the UN members. All States have to energise themselves to the achievement of these goals within their respective territories, or else they will be answerable to a global watch and the performance record of each State will come up for evaluation and grading. That would carry a certain amount of opprobrium and generate pressures upon the non-achievers who must act fast to live up to the international expectations. Surely it did not do much credit to our own statesmen to be told that this nation has sunk as low as 134th rank in the Human Development Index and yet they mouth inflated projections of India becoming an economic super power.

Now all that is about performance or non-performance of individual governments. What is more pertinent to our discussion is that these Millennium Development Goals are essentially a reflection of emerging UN concern regarding **human beings per se.** Global governance today is gradually giving way to global recognition of the importance of human beings as human beings, of the gravity of individual man's sufferings and the plight of national backwardness, of the centrality of human development in every possible direction. Sevice to humanity, in other words, is now coming centre stage as the principal value goal of international organizations. And it would be uncharitable and too hasty to assume ( as we so often do) that the UN is there to simply give

sermons from its high pedestal, being unable to do much by itself. On the contrary, the UN is itself getting increasingly involved in the amelioration of the human condition. As facts stand, questions of international security are getting no greater attention in UN agenda than the more mundane issues of providing food, shelter, medicine, education to the needy and sending disaster relief to the victims of large scale calamity. To the extent the UN can cater to these needs by raising funds from the relatively well- off nations, it sets in motion a world wide redistributive programme.

The dominant tendency in world politics today is twofold: (a) powerful nations have become reconciled to the wisdom of reducing inter se conflicts through dialogue, thereby creating an overall environment of conflict management and (b) smaller nations have grown accustomed to collective bargaining with the dominant powers to push forward their agenda of national development and poverty eradication by demanding a more equitable share in the fruits of international trade. Since a large part of their plight is attributable to the disabilities they suffered as a result of colonial exploitation by Western powers and the continuing unequal terms of trade imposed by the developed West, there is a valid ground for fixing some moral responsibility upon them— which is why a demand, is placed for extending some Official Development Assistance (ODA) at a prescribed rate of their GDP (originally pegged at 1% though the actual release is far less, ranging between 0.5% and 0.8%, with Japan as the most substantial donor so far) to the developing nations. To be honest, the larger reason for backwardness of the underdeveloped part of the world is structural and is compounded by governance deficit. Hence, backwardness could go to the extent the concerned societies could hasten the long overdue structural reform of their respective economies and make the ruling class accept greater responsibility than they have done so

far in the national interest. There is also a lot to be done about relaxing the socio-political constraints under which development projections become invariably skewed in favour of the privileged classes.

## IV

As long as these domestic disabilities persist, the larger dream of bridging the rich nation-poor nation divide will not materialize. Internationally speaking, all such national disabilities would act as a brake on every step taken towards global peace. Consequently, the UN no longer looks upon the issue of security as separate from the issues of human security. It is this changed perspective that persuades the UN to no longer hesitate from entering the domestic jurisdiction of nations, hitherto prohibited under an antiquated notion of exclusive domain of the State. The debate over the DJ article 2 para 7 of the UN Charter has gone far enough so that the supposed grounds of inviolability no longer hold water. Rather, they have been suspect as convenient excuses to be impervious to the dictates of the common conscience of humanity—witness the way the practice of apartheid used to be shielded by the white regime in South Africa from global condemnation or the criticism that the excesses committed by the state authorities during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China (1989). The prevailing consensus today is clearly in favour of making States accountable not only to their nationals but also to the international community in respect of their bounden duties to the people under internationally ratified conventions. Failed States can no longer hide from international action.

Let us take a quick look at some such interventions. To begin with, the financial crisis nearly paralysing several South East Asian countries, towards the end of the last century, saw some corrective measures being taken by the IMF but the interesting thing is that there was loud criticism of the inadequacy and tardiness of the

monetary intervention from the world body; and this criticism came as much from the West as from the rest. The economic health of nations could not be left to the whims of inept and corrupt governments working in collusion with local agents of crony capitalism. A complete overhaul of the IMF functions was therefore, commissioned at the instance of the UN General Assembly on recommendation of the Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz. Eventually, it turned out that the leading economies like the G-8 countries cold shouldered the proposal, whereupon Mr Ban ki-Moon, the Secretary General of the UN, persuaded the better off among developing countries to provide for a cushioning package of some trillion US dollars.

Several things should be clear from this episode. One, though this is a matter belonging to the domestic economic policies of nations, international authorities cannot remain indifferent onlookers when conjunction with foreign capital inflow results in unacceptable jeopardy. True, the arrival, stay and flight of foreign capital are an economic decision of the concerned multinational corporations. But, exercise of this autonomy need not mean taking a developing host nation for a ride. Second, the UN of which the IMF is an associated organ wants rationalisation of its operations in the interest of the economic security of the peoples concerned, no matter whether their governments are indifferent or incapable in handling such matters. Third, the UN could successfully involve some of the more prosperous among developing nations in providing remedial financial relief when developed nations, in spite of being the countries of origin of foreign capital, refused to come up with any worthwhile solutions. Incidentally, this has strengthened the current arguments from developing nations for expanding their financial hold on the IMF, so long mainly a rich nations' club.

Next in line of our consideration is the humanitarian relief missions undertaken by the United Nations. They are particularly visible in respect of internally displaced persons and captured rebels of war ravaged countries like Sri Lanka. Elsewhere, for post-civil war reconstruction of economic and political infrastructure, the UN member states pledged substantial financial aid packages. Somalia in Africa and Afghanistan in Asia are two of the contemporary beneficiaries of this vital support coming from outside, which has gone a long way in stabilizing the internal governance of the countries and opened up fresh avenues of development that would do good to the local people.

Another country in Asia which captures news headlines these days is Myanmar which is currently on the threshold of a transition to democracy from prolonged military rule, has been receiving necessary assistance of the UN and its agencies so that popular representative government is restored, without in any way disrupting the nation-building programmes already under way. An earlier experiment in Cambodia for similar purposes earned volumes of compliment for continuous assistance in effecting national reconciliation among various political factions, in getting a viable constitution drafted and approved and in finally holding nationwide general elections. But, no less important, is initiating international proceedings against former state officials accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing under the designated court of criminal justice.

Possibly miles apart from the conventional activities of a world political body is promotion of global tourism in a bid to let peoples of different societies come closer and know each other better. Economically, this is a fast expanding enterprise which generates jobs and income to the ordinary peoples of the host countries. Keeping that in view, the World Tourism Organization (a different WTO) has proposed a road map for the beautification and nature

friendliness of the tourist spots so as to help fulfil the environmental promises of eco-tourism.

On a vexed social question, again, the UN is not shy of addressing them either, especially where it concerns the protection of basic human rights. One of the accused is our own country and the accusing finger was raised by the government of our neighbouring nation, Nepal. The matter relates to the perpetuation of the most entrenched system of social exclusion of the underprivileged which is otherwise known as casteism. Charges of caste-bound discrimination brought by the Nepal representative Dorji Gautam led the UN to despatch a delegation headed by Navaneethan Pillay of the UN Commission of Human Rights. The delegation came to New Delhi and urged Manmohan Singh government to do something about this age old curse. Now, whatever the position of the Indian Government on this issue being thus internationalised, the point remains that casteism is a die hard trait of the Indian social system and it does require an all out cultural reappraisal. Incidentally, on this question Swamiji spared no strong word against his own countrymen. As such the correctives are to proceed from the civil society and will be regarded as a measure of the enlightenment we Indians could claim today after having lived under democratic dispensations in several spheres including measures of reverse discrimination, special rehabilitation schemes of the downtrodden and various measures of caste empowerment. But wholesale de-casteification might be problematic if we consider how caste based occupations still provide job opportunities to the different strata of the less privileged in the society away from the fierce competition associated with the organised sector of the economy. This is an area which requires more in-depth and clearly disinterested sociological analysis. No doubt, the ideas of Swamiji should be of useful guidance for any such initiative.

Another important issue of serious socio-economic consequence is about the incidence of school dropouts and child labour in developing countries, including India. However, embarrassing these charges are, we must acknowledge our own governance deficit which has been partly made up by the recent passage of the Right to Education bill, with provision for free and compulsory enrolment of children of the underprivileged sections. The national judiciary played a very significant role to push the government to action including, for instance, providing drinking water and sanitary toilet arrangements in the schools. Honourable Judges of the apex court have also prodded the government to ensure food security to the poor masses particularly when the national buffer stock is overflowing. This progressive outlook in public policy making can be regarded as a follow up of the conscious movements world wide for "human security".

Finally, another completely unconventional matter—the valued treasures of human thought which come out of philosophical disposition. This has received special recognition lately of the world body. In 2002, the UN has declared 23 November to be observed as **World Philosophy Day.** The Secretary General Mr Ban ki-Moon had this to say on this occasion: "Philosophy deals in universal.... in broadly shared questions ...about human existence, beliefs and behaviour. That gives it *uncommon power* to build bridges between peoples and open channels of communication among cultures." Could there be a more elegant enunciation of the global community's service to humanity?

V

Before concluding this presentation, let me emphasize one other thing. Institutions do not denote only physical structures such as UN, EU, ASEAN or WTO with assigned functions. Institutions can also be those which are not built around neatly drawn out programmes and blueprints. They may not

underperform for that reason but can very well outperform many similar bodies and yet they seldom ever satisfy their votaries. But their speciality lies in their readiness to be driven to action by imaginative responses to unprecedented situations and unexpected crises. This is where we find the ingenuity of the UN when it launched for the first time a Peacekeeping Operation in the sombre backdrop of the Suez Crisis (1956). By invoking the Uniting-for-Peace, Resolution adopted during the Korean war (1951) and recognizing the UN General Assembly's competence to initiate action when the Security Council goes into a deadlock, the then Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, hit upon a new way to make two veto wielding big powers, Britain and France, to accept ceasefire by sending peace troops under the UN banner, famously called the Blue Berrets, relying entirely on the contingents contributed not by big powers but by willing smaller nations. The UN forces went to the theatre *not to call the shots but to silence the guns on both sides*. In another unprecedented crisis, not due to war but a natural calamity, the so-called Tsunami, the UN offered the nodal services necessary to set disaster control to immediate motion. So whether in war or in peace, the services of the international bodies can be of immense significance and bring great relief to the suffering humanity.

For international institutions to grow and function in a frictionless environment, it is necessary that international law making must have its sway all through. It is encouraging to see expert hands continuously working under the dual cover of ILC (International Law Commission) and the ILA (International Law Association) –the one inter-governmental and the other a private association. They are dedicated to drafting, codifying, amending and updating legal norms pertaining to state-to-state transactions as well as state-citizen interface. This is how new regime

formations come to the fore, such as the new Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), the GATS agreement, the Rio Convention and the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming, Conventions concerning Rights of Women and of Children, the Johannesburg Convention to promote "sustainable development" and many such instruments of international legislation. They all signify a non-stop movement to bring into order an otherwise chaotic international society with big powers lording over every aspect of international life. These initiatives, in fact, serve to define the future contours of the world society where human beings as individuals *per se* would be able to occupy their rightful position in the international order. In this venture global as well as regional organizations are busy playing roles that are complementary. And all this has been made possible because of the growth of a new international consciousness on the part of individual citizens to be ready to come out of their national seclusion and pushing up the global civil society movements. Till now this global civil society is in a loose, amorphous and unorganized state; nevertheless its emergence in the course of the present and the preceding decades has opened up new vistas in which global issues and national concerns are entering into a common discourse. The dividing line between the local and the global is fast eroding as much as the old paradigm of "state only" view of world affairs is falling apart. With NGOS of innumerable formations engaged in varied fields of activities across the state boundaries, it is being increasingly felt that they often prove to be much better, more efficient and genuinely the most cost-effective mode of serving humanity. No state today can really contribute to human welfare without depending in some way or other on the citizens' self-help groups. On the whole, therefore, we may say that some sort of a communitarian view of world order is taking roots in place of a formal world view which so long kept the individual man marginalized from the purview of a possible global governance structure.

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Creation pre-supposes diversity – a process seemingly opposed to unity, perhaps a silent denial of oneness. Why should then man, an outcome of diversity, speak of oneness; reclaim a truth rejected? Why should humanity want to explore avenues of unity? Could diverse unconnected individuals want to bind themselves in a bond of oneness, if it did not already exist at a deeper and subtle level? Is it ever possible for conflicting individuals to come together and continue to be so without a common basis of unity? As we examine this apparent paradox we are led to understand that "disunity exists only in the human mind and dispelling this through proper understanding will vindicate an eternally existing unity. The more human understanding conforms to this truth, the more will it be in harmony with creation and the more peace would prevail".

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